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MILLY'S HERO.

VOL. III.

MILLY'S HERO.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY," "UNDER THE SPELL,"

"WILDFLOWER," Etc.

"Equality is no rule in Love's grammar."

HEYWOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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(CONTINUED.)

SET APART.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER III.

THE CREDITORS FACE THE ACCOUNTS.

WHEN one waits patiently for failure, failure generally arrives. He is pretty sure of the *dénouement* who builds not on one hope of success.

Mr. Fyvie had been only anxious to put his house in order, to show a fair set of account-books, a business well conducted to the end, and a true and strict register of honourable dealings, from the opening of Wheal Desperation to its close. That being done, and he being able to retire with honour from the scene, he was prepared to ring in his creditors, and face them with an unblushing front. He had done his best, and they who knew him best would believe in his assertion. They would believe him more readily, as he was about to pay every farthing that he owed them, as the transfer of the mine to his creditors would enable him to pay every farthing, and leave him, as the phrase

runs, with scarcely a shilling to bless himself. There had been one faint hope that, sinking deeper into the bowels of the earth, they would light upon fresh and richer metal; but the best metal had been near the surface in Wheal Desperation, and the last shaft had but only added to the working expenses.

So a circular was despatched to all old friends, and the "ringing in," to which allusion has been made, took place in the large coffee-room of a principal hotel at Plymouth.

This a week after James Whiteshell had called on Laurence Raxford, who was left to wonder whether the old man was still in ignorance, or, distrusting him, as Milly had done before him, was keeping the silence that he had threatened. All was guess-work, for the old man had not been seen again in the neighbourhood of the mine.

Now the climax was reached, and after the day of meeting, Laurence would be free to act for himself—to search for himself, and to hunt down the mystery that had rendered him unhappy. Had it not been for old Mr. Fyvie, he would have been glad even of the complete ruin of the business hopes that he had had once, for he would be his own

master from to-morrow. Under any circumstances it was satisfactory to think that his freedom was near at hand—that having done his duty, and sacrificed much for duty, he could, with a clear conscience, think for himself next day. It would have been a matter for exultation if he could have rescued the ship from the wreck, steered it into deep water, and resigned the partnership for good, and like a hero; but to run it upon the shore, and escape with all hands, and with all honour, was, to him, at any rate, a relief. He scarcely knew how passionately he had loved Milly Athorpe, until this trouble, apart from hers, had stood in his way like a rock.

The meeting was called at Plymouth, where some of the leading creditors resided; and the meeting was small enough, not a dozen creditors, on the whole, but that dozen representing a colossal claim upon the estate. Every one knew that it had been Mr. Jonathan Fyvie's past extravagance that had brought the old man to ruin—and there was no occasion for the senior partner to offer any explanation as to the causes which had thus reduced him. There had been many cheques drawn by Jonathan Fyvie junior in the name of

the firm, that had not been applied to the purposes for which the money lay at the bankers—the son had freely made use of the common purse for his own purposes, and had it been the purse of Fortunatus, he must have emptied it. He had not acted dishonestly, according to the law of partnership, as it existed at the time—he had not even acted with a dishonest intention in his heart; but he had gone on with a recklessness that was the recklessness of despair, or with a faith in the resources of the estate that was the faith of a fool.

Still, had he been a whit less extravagant, the property would have been saved to the Fyvie—perhaps to the third and fourth generation—for at the last they had escaped prosperity by a hair's breadth.

Thoughts like these—and more thoughts than these—passing through the minds of the creditors, as Mr. Fyvie stood with his back towards the bay-window, behind which shimmered the blue sea in the light of the afternoon sun. Near to him—facing him as one of the principal creditors—Laurence was surprised to see Mr. Engleton, looking more wiry-haired and sallow in his new energy. He had been beating up the manufacturing firms

for a good philanthropic subject, had met with a good business man, and drifted into commerce as a sleeping partner—turning up as a Co., even to the surprise of Mr. Fyvie, who had neither seen nor heard of the gentleman since he had been a guest at Tavvydale House.

Mr. Fyvie, senior, had not a long speech to make. There were the books and the accounts to compare with the balance-sheet that had been forwarded to them last week—there was Wheel Desperation at their service, and they would find their money, and good interest for their money, therein. There was himself, he added, with a slight French shrug of his shoulders.

“And where is your son, Mr. Fyvie?” asked one irascible gentleman—the only man who looked sourly at all these proceedings; “his signature is required to half-a-dozen documents before the mine can be formally made over to the creditors.”

“He will be here,” said Mr. Fyvie.

Laurence was astonished at this firm assertion; he had not expected that Jonathan would enter upon the scene again, and he had fancied that the matter would be arranged without his presence there.

"I don't believe that he will come," was the flat assertion made in this place.

"With all his faults, he has a habit of keeping his word," said Mr. Fyvie, drily; "perhaps that was the only good thing I taught him."

He gave a little sigh at this, and then coughed violently to smother it, fidgeting about with the papers heaped on the table.

Business matters in a novel are best kept out of sight, or passed over as rapidly as possible, if they form part of the machinery of action; the fair reader will be glad to hear that we are going to leave these creditors, and these solicitors who represent the creditors and the partners in the firm, to worry and tease over the agreements and other documents, with which the room was full.

Mr. Engleton was the busiest man in the community, but gave the most trouble, as he referred but seldom to the solicitors, and kept starting the strangest ideas for the arrangement of affairs, after everything had been almost decided. At the very end of the discussion, he took Laurence confidentially aside, saying,

"Can I speak a word or two to you, Mr. Raxford?"

"Certainly."

"All this has made a very deep impression upon me," he said very rapidly; "I wouldn't have gone into commerce at all, if I had had an idea—the least idea—that I should have come into collision with my old friends. Won't they sink these debts for a little while, and let you begin again, and wipe the lot off by degrees?"

"I am afraid not," said Laurence, shaking his head; "the mine must be your security—must, in fact, be transferred to yourselves."

"Well, we will not let you starve, if we can help it. This is not bankruptcy, but an honourable break-down. That son was an infernal scamp and profligate, I am afraid. He'll never face us."

"I fear not," said Laurence.

"A daughter like an angel, and a son like a devil, and both of one family—how do you account for that?"

"I have not attempted to account for it."

"I shall start—put into working order—as soon as possible, an institution for honourable but decayed merchants. A first-class affair, where every man, *sans reproche*, shall have a thousand a year at least, so that no sudden drops to indigence can

possibly occur. Don't you think this a very good idea?"

"I am afraid that it is not practicable."

"We'll see about that," said Engleton, with a knowing nod of his head towards our hero; "I don't sleep over my ideas—and you'll see."

Laurence saw that it came to nothing in due course, which was not the prospect *in futuro* to which Mr. Engleton had wished to draw his attention.

"Then it is settled that we take the mine for the debt," said a creditor.

"Yes—certainly," cried Engleton, "and a very good take, too. If it is not better than taking our money, I'm a Dutchman."

"And it leaves, upon your own calculations, Mr Fyvie—or Mr. Raxford—about two hundred and fifty pounds a year for the late proprietors, after paying us in full. This based on the calculations of past years."

"Yes."

"I think that we can venture to make it two hundred and fifty pounds a year each," cried Engleton; "I mean for these two, of course—not that other one."

"Really, Mr. Engleton, I wish you would consider the feelings of the creditors more," cried the angry little man; "if you can afford it, we can't. Mr. Fyvie has drawn this up himself, and I dare say that he has done the best for himself that he could. Everybody does."

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance," said Mr. Fyvie, looking at him through his eyeglass very sternly; "this is the first time that we have met, I think."

"The first time, sir."

"Had you met me twenty years ago under similar circumstances, and hazarded the same comment, I should have opened this window and dropped you into the sea."

"Good God, sir!"

"As it is, I must ask my young friend Mr. Raxford to do me that invaluable service," exclaimed Mr. Fyvie.

As the junior partner was looking at him as sternly as the senior, the abashed creditor said hastily,

"I am sorry to have hurt any one's feelings—I spoke in the heat of the moment, I assure you. The accounts are very fair and square, and all

that. Nothing can be fairer and squarer, sir."

"Very good—we will dismiss the subject and accept your apology," said the debtor with becoming dignity. "I set down two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and my partner and I will not accept a farthing more until you have cleared off the debt, with compound interest. But all this is arranged."

"It is arranged that you should receive that amount, sir," said one of the legal gentlemen, bending across the table towards Mr. Fyvie.

"That we should—Mr. Raxford and I."

"But Mr. Raxford told us——"

"That as he brought not one penny into the firm, so he will not receive one penny from it, sir," interrupted Laurence; "that," he added very firmly and defiantly, "is arranged, and no one can shake my will concerning it."

"Laurence, my wife has two hundred a year in her own right," whispered Mr. Fyvie, at whose side he was now.

"Don't vex me, sir. I am young and strong, and the whole world is before me to make my fortune in."

"But——"

"Mr. Fyvie, I have sworn this," said Laurence, "and it must be."

"Well—well—it is generous. But we will talk of this another time."

Mr. Fyvie, who had kept firm throughout, winced a little at his partner's stronger will, fidgeted with the papers again, and finally drew forth his watch.

The action attracted attention, and he noticed it.

"Jonathan is not behind time, gentlemen—he said between four and five, and it now wants twenty minutes to the latter hour. You may rely upon him."

"If he should disappoint you, sir," whispered Laurence, "he so thoughtless, and so little regardful of the wishes of others."

"Yes—but I told him that I had given my word—pledged *my* good faith that he should be present. And that boy was prouder of my honour than his own."

"A strange man. A stranger man still if he appear."

"You will not greet him as a friend?"

"No, sir—I cannot."

"Because he has ruined you?"

"No—but because he has brought ruin to a home where there would have been peace without him."

"You don't know a great deal of the world, or you would look over that," said Mr. Fyvie coolly.

But Laurence's words appeared to suggest a new thought to the old man, for when the creditors were gathered in one group at the end of the room, and Mr. Engleton was gesticulating in their midst in a most excited manner, Mr. Fyvie's voice commanded silence and attention.

"Gentlemen, I have only to say that this is a business meeting, and that I hope you will not allude to private and personal matters when my son appears. I don't know," he added, repressing an expression of grief, which stole to his face despite him, "whether it will pain him or not, but—it will me."

"Mr. Fyvie," said Engleton, "we are friends of yours still, we trust. More, we are business men, and have met here solely for business purposes. Mr. Raxford," turning to our hero, "it has been suggested——"

"By yourself," said one creditor, more conscientious than the rest.

"Was it?—thank you—I had forgotten," said Engleton; "it has been suggested by myself—now, I think of it, I was going to say so—and approved by the rest of the community, that you should accept office under us as chief manager at Wheal Desperation. You are from the Royal School of Mines, with the best of characters," he said, affecting to treat the matter lightly; "we can see that you have been of immense service to the Messrs. Fyvie—we know that you are acquainted with the workings of the mine, and the men who work it, and assured that we can trust you with our interests as with your own, we beg that you will accept the post we offer you."

Laurence recoiled from it, as though a bowl of poison had been offered him.

"I am going away from Devonshire—I am anxious—very anxious—to be free."

"The salary we have fixed upon, by way of a commencement——"

"Sir—you must leave me free for a while," interrupted Laurence, with almost passionate haste; "in Wheal Desperation I have known nothing but misery yet, and I would be quit of it!"

"But a month hence—when the excitement of

all this is over, and you have sobered down again," urged Engleton, "you may think of this?"

"Then there will be time enough to speak of it," said Laurence, fretfully. "You are very kind, gentlemen, and I thank you," he added, becoming aware of his own ungraciousness; "but you cannot imagine how anxious I am to be my own master for a while."

"Oh! yes, I can," said Engleton; "I think that sticking to one shop, or one idea, is dreadful work, and softens the brain. We will not speak of this again for a month—meanwhile, there is much to do, and I have a plan of my own as to the working of the mine to submit to you."

The gentlemen whom he addressed, and who were looking disconsolate at Laurence's refusal of their offer—although a few of them had objected to that offer in the first instance—made a wry face or two at this.

"Five minutes to five," said the solicitor for the creditors; "I am afraid that it does not matter much about your plans and offers now—and that we shall have to hold another meeting to consider how——"

"Mr. Jonathan Fyvie," announced a waiter at

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the door, and the tall figure of the man for whom all had anxiously waited came into the room.


“I am thankful,” murmured the father.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WHO KEPT HIS WORD.

JONATHAN FYVIE looked taller than ever as he came into the room—for he was thinner, and more gaunt and angular. He was well dressed—even carefully dressed, as a man should be who is about to face men ready to pick holes in his coat ; but there was, despite that, an utter carelessness of walk and look and manner that struck Laurence as he bowed slightly to the people looking at him, before dropping into the seat which a hand more friendly than the rest had placed for him.

It had been a task almost beyond his strength to come there ; for he was a man that disliked facing his responsibilities, and had never cared for the society of crowds about him—and a crowd of creditors is never pleasant company. He had been walking the streets of Plymouth, and



prowling round the hotel till the last moment, before he had summoned the courage to enter the room—but there he was at last, a haggard, listless man of the world, seeming to care for nothing so that the part he had to play was not too long for him, and affairs might be wound up at once, and leave him free to go his miserable way again.

He had glanced furtively at Laurence sitting by his father's side, and then, meeting but little sympathy in the franker face before him, had glanced at his father, who had said in a low tone,

“Well, Jonathan—you have not betrayed me in this.”

“No, sir,” he had replied, before turning his attention to the withdrawal of a pair of gloves from his hot hands ; which operation having been accomplished, he sat patiently waiting for any communication that might be made to him.

“Mr. Jonathan Fyvie, I presume,” said one of the solicitors, to whom Mr. Fyvie, junior, was a stranger.

There was a general murmur of assent, which saved Jonathan the trouble of replying.

“We presume, too, sir, that you are fully acquainted with the terms of the agreement between

the firm and the creditors, and are prepared to affix your signature with your father and Mr. Raxford's."

"Fully acquainted with everything, sir, and prepared to sign anything that you have handy there."

"If you will allow me," said the solicitor on the mining side—the losing side, "I will read——"

"If I tell you that I am fully acquainted with all the details," said Jonathan, "you will perceive that there is no necessity to read any documents for my behoof. The whole thing has been brought to ruin by me—utterly to ruin. Surely that's enough!"

"Your father will receive two hundred and fifty pounds a year—that is all that the estate can afford at present. Mr. Raxford has stipulated that you and he should not participate in that amount—and it being barely necessary——"

"There, there," he said with a visible shudder, "it is simply starvation for the old man."

"No, it is not, Jonathan," said that old man of whom the son had spoken as though he was not present there.

"And," Jonathan added, with a short unpleasant

laugh, "I hope that even you don't think so badly of me as to think that I would put in my claim for any part of it? By heaven, gentlemen, I would sooner put a pistol to my head!"

He struck his hand with a sudden passion on the table, and sent the pens out of the inkstand, and some splashes of ink over Mr. Engleton's shirt-front; then the passion died away again with the echo that had made the window-glass vibrate, and he was waiting patiently for all that might be asked of him.

"Then we may complete the transfer of the property—the dissolution of the partnership between these gentlemen—and the other little matters at once."

Then began all the signing, sealing, and delivering—the fussiness of law—and presently the whole thing was a fact accomplished; and two young men were cast upon the world, and one who had been rich remained but poorly endowed. It was all over, and the creditors were passing from the room, shaking hands with the three partners, wishing them better fortune—renewed prosperity—and everything else not likely to come to men who had

dropped so surely and heavily from their high estate as they had.

The creditors, Mr. Engleton excepted, shook hands impartially with all three. If Jonathan had been a black sheep, that was not their business—if it was reported in the world that he had run away with somebody else's wife, at least their wives were safe, and the mine was equal to a dividend of twenty shillings in the pound. Sanguine men amongst them thought twenty-four shillings in the pound might be looked to with a certain degree of hope, and they shook hands more heartily with Jonathan than the rest.

Mr. Engleton bore Jonathan Fyvie no malice, and had been but lately a guest at his father's table; but he was a staid, strait-laced man, running over with crotchets concerning the morality that there should be in the world; and he could not face as a friend the man who had outraged society by his guilt and duplicity.

He walked out of the room without a word to Jonathan, and went into the street, pausing opposite the house, to tap his forehead with a new idea or to let a new idea escape thence.

"If we could pronounce such men as young Fyvie

dangerous to society, and lock them up in one nice large institution, what a world the rest of us would make of it!"

Meanwhile, the man who was dangerous to society had sat in his place, languid and indifferent, until the last man had gone, and left the *ci-devant* partners together—for the first time alone together in business conclave since they had put one common name at the head of their circulars.

Then Jonathan's indifference, or hardness, or whatever it was, melted away, and he turned a flushed and agitated face towards his father, and to him who had been his friend.

"Heaven knows I did not dream that it would be so bad as this!" he cried. "If that is any excuse for me, take it both of you. If not, why curse me sitting here."

"No, we will not do that," said his father.

"You cannot curse me worse than I have cursed myself," he cried.

"I do not think all this is worth raving about now," said Mr. Fyvie, drily; "the mine has changed hands, and here we are at the very end of our commercial enterprise. What do you mean to do?"

"I don't know, sir," was the gloomy answer.

"And don't care?" added his father, interrogatively.

"Not much—not at all!" Jonathan answered, desperately.

"That is a foolish recklessness, which can't lead to any good, Jonathan," Mr. Fyvie said; "surely this might teach a lesson to you. Is it quite impossible—even at the eleventh hour—to begin afresh?"

"Quite!"

"You know that there is a small income belonging to your mother, from which she would be glad to allow you sufficient for another start."

"No, I'll not touch it."

Mr. Fyvie looked earnestly and wistfully at him as he sat there, with his head bent downwards, listless and crestfallen, and his hand idling with the pens upon the table.

"What will you do?"

"I shall hide myself away from you," he said. "I am an unlucky man, bringing ill luck to all who come in contact with me. So I will steer clear of the few for whom I have respect yet. You know, you will try to believe, both of you, that I

am sorry for this break-up, and that I take all the blame upon myself?"

"It's of no consequence now who takes the blame," replied the father.

"Oh! but it is," said Jonathan, quickly. "And I don't want to evade it. If ever I get rich," he added, as though he had, despite his past reckless airs, a prospect ahead of him, in which a hope was flickering yet, "I will make good my words, sir. I ventured here to-day, anxious to make a long statement, to tell the whole story of how I came to grief, to ask the pardon of you two, if not your sympathy. But I can't do it—and, after all, it does not matter."

"Quite right," said the firm father.

"I am very glad to see that you bear your losses well, sir," he said to his father; "you are an old man in a thousand."

"He is a fool who frets at the unalterable, Jonathan."

"You, Laurence, are young, and strong, and clever—you will succeed in life, I think—I hope."

Laurence slightly inclined his head. He might succeed—he might fail—he had his own opinion

on his chances of success, and he did not care for Jonathan Fyvie's.

Jonathan, having offered this little encouragement to his late partners, and disturbed once again by the coldness with which it had been received, idled with the pens once more. He was conscious of looking all that was mean and despicable in their eyes; he was as sorry as a man of his nature could be that others had suffered with himself for his improvidence; he was anxious for their forgiveness and sympathy, and he believed that he was not a bad fellow at heart, but the creature of the unfortunate circumstances that had surrounded him!

"I'm not fond of preaching," he said, with more excitement, and in tones that were more genuine in consequence. "I'm not a man with a strong will, and I have met with great temptations all my life; ah! and tried to fight against them, too. God knows I have!—though God knows, too, how miserably I have failed!"

"You have thought too much of yourself, and too little of others," said Mr. Fyvie, coldly, "and the result is not satisfactory to anybody. Try and amend."

"It's no use trying now," said Jonathan; "every bad habit is burnt into me!"

"Then, God help you, my son!"

Mr. Fyvie packed up a few papers before him, twisted a piece of red tape round them, secured them with a neat bow and ends, and then rose, as though weary of his subject. Laurence looked anxiously towards the old man, whose calmness of demeanour he doubted, but whose struggle to be unmoved and philosophic to the last he admired. Mr. Fyvie stood beating the papers against the palm of his left hand for a while. Jonathan took up his hat from the carpet, and rose with him.

"I shan't go back with you, sir—I can't face *them*," he said.

"I think it is as well, until you can face them with a better story than to-day's. It is as well that I should go alone to your mother, leaving you to return to the adulteress."

The sting, sudden and sharp, was almost too much for Jonathan; he was not prepared for it, and he went back a step or two in an uncertain, awkward haste, as though his father had struck him.

"Sir—sir," he repeated twice.

"Is it possible that you can blush now?" said Mr. Fyvie—"well, then, I have hope of you."

Jonathan Fyvie's heightened colour disappeared as quickly as it had come, and was replaced by a strange, death-like pallor.

"I will go now," he stammered forth.

"What has become of that poor woman?" asked Mr. Fyvie—"is she with you still, or have you cast her off yet?"

"Don't ask me," he cried, with excitement; "I have much to bear."

"Yes, I agree with you," returned his father; "there is her ruin and her husband's to your share, as well as the ruin of our house. You are too heavily laden for heaven, sir."

"I have no hope of it," was the despairing cry, "though—though I did not take her away from her husband. There, I did not—I did not—I *did not!*"

For the second time that day his hand smote the table passionately, and then he went with a rush to the door, pausing thereat to look towards them with a bewildered face.

"What have I said?" he asked, vacantly.

"A lie—simply," was the terse reply of Mr. Fyvie.

"Don't you know—anything?" he inquired; "you have not heard—you have not seen—why, where is Athorpe?"

"Gone away—a madman."

"A madman, of whom it is best to beware," said Laurence, speaking to him for the first time.

"Yes, I know that," said Jonathan; "he would have my life if he could, and he may have it if he likes. He has blasted it almost from the beginning to end, and I had more right to Inez than he had, for I loved her first of all, and she, I am sure of it, loved me."

"Two such loving souls should be very happy in their fallen state," said Mr. Fyvie; "but there is always something in the way of perfect bliss, especially bliss *à la Française*."

"Sir, I will not have this!" shouted Jonathan, standing at bay at last—"reproach me as you will with your ruin, and I bear it, but with hers—I can't. For she was pure at heart; no one is more glad of it than I am now. She stood her ground when I became a coward, and tempted her—she

was at her best and brightest when Athorpe killed her!"

"*What?*" shouted Laurence and old Fyvie in one breath.

"Not his accuser—I am no man's; but he had no mercy, and *was* raving mad with hate of her. He killed her, sir, but I am more her murderer than he is. Why did I come here to suffer the torments of the damned before my time?"

He dashed from the room before an effort could have been made to stop him, had that thought occurred to either man left staring at each other there.

"Is this—this possible?" said Laurence.

"I don't think that it is," replied Mr. Fyvie, after a moment's thought—"it's too much like melo-drama. It's an allegory, or something, and as Jonathan has not stopped to explain, and as we have other matters to attend to, I don't see any occasion to trouble our minds further with his rhodomontade."

"I will make inquiries," said Laurence, thoughtfully.

"We don't deal in murders down in Devon," said Mr. Fyvie, "and Jonathan is quite as mad

as Captain Athorpe, and I'll swear is equally as destructive with property—only, with him, the property, unfortunately, is not his own.”

Laurence again looked attentively at Mr. Fyvie. This airy and light manner was, to a certain extent, part of his senior partner's character, but it had been a natural part of it in prosperous times, and when the troubles came it had been simply his home disguise. Laurence was sure that his partner's gay words were all forced now, and was at a loss to see the necessity for them, in the presence of a man who had been ruined with him.

“Shall we go now, Mr. Fyvie?”

“With all my heart, Laurence. It's after office hours.”

They went out of the room, and down the broad stairs together. Flitting about the hall were half a dozen waiters, anxious to be in the way when Mr. Fyvie departed. The mining proprietor was well known there, and had always been liberal with his douceurs—the lackeys had even hope of him in the days of his decadence.

Mr. Fyvie shook his head at them as he reached the bottom stairs. He was quick of apprehension still, and realized facts at a glance.

"We have nothing to give away but our blessing on this occasion, gentlemen," he said; "will you kindly make the best of that, and share it, as well as you can, between you."

"Oh! Mr. Fyvie, we don't want anything from you," said the head waiter, suddenly seized with contrition on the spot. "We're very sorry to hear of the business going wrong, sir. What are all you chaps hulking about here for?—isn't there *anything* to do?" he said, ironically.

"Good day, good day," said the old man.

"Good day, sir, and good luck again, sir."

"And good luck again," quoted Mr. Fyvie, when they were in the streets of Plymouth, "in the good time, for the honest, and true, and *young*,"—passing his arm through that of Laurence's—"why not?"

"Why not for all, sir?"

"I am not so energetic as I was," said Mr. Fyvie, "I don't know that I care for any more good luck. I only hope to be strong enough to keep *them* strong."

"With God's blessing, I hope that, sir!"

"You will come home with me to-night?"

"I—I thought of leaving at once for London."

"I want you to see my new home in Tavistock—a little quiet villa, on the road to the old mine. Not so large a place as Tavvydale House—which Engleton has bought, by the way, my agents tell me—but a place where it will be easy—I hope it will be easy—to feel content in. As for myself, why, Laurence, I am content already."

"Your wife and daughter will be—women are more quick, I think, to adapt themselves to circumstances, and make the best of everything."

"Hester will, for she's a brave girl. But the poor old lady has some pride of her own still, is an invalid, and has been used to the gratification of every wish. Still, the Fates be good to us," he said, dashing again into the light vein that was particularly objectionable to Laurence that day, "we'll pump up the sunshine, and all three of us be jolly. Come with me to-night?"

"You are alone there?"

"No, I am not alone. My wife and daughter came back yesterday, and I want you to see them—just as you used—for I think they understand you now, and they know that you have been a friend to me. I have been singing to your praise and glory with no end of energy lately."

"Miss Fyvie is at home?" said Laurence, eagerly.

"Yes. And though there, may be a little confusion at first meeting, it will wear off, as it should do. You don't object to being our friend, our every-day friend, to look in upon us, and cheer us now and then with that good-tempered face of yours? Why, I may want cheering myself sometimes, and for the sake of the old man you will come?"

"I will come to-night, sir. I am very anxious to see Miss Fyvie—she saw Milly last."

"Ahem—I would not begin talking about Milly, Laurence. That is rather a vexatious topic to introduce to the poor girl."

"Ah! you do not understand me—you cannot comprehend my great suspense, for I have not intruded my deepest trouble on you."

"Thank you for that," said Mr. Fyvie; "I appreciate the motive for your reticence. Well, come homewith me, and talk to Hester even of yoursweet-heart if it please you, and you have—the pluck!"

"I will come, sir," said Laurence firmly.

A few minutes afterwards, and they were in the train, bearing them from the bustling sea-port towards the quiet and pretty town of Tavistock.

They travelled third-class, as befitted the new condition of things, and in the crowded compartment in which they were ensconced there was but little opportunity for conversation. Both men sat very quietly facing each other, and both became very full of thought—stern, hard thought that would be kept down no longer—as they were whirled away to Tavistock.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXPLANATION COMES AT LAST.

LAURENCE did not think much of the embarrassments natural to the position of facing a girl to whom he had been engaged to be married. Had he not possessed deeper and graver thoughts, he would but have reflected on the delicacy of his own position, rather than of the feelings of Hester Fyvie.

Looking from his own point of view, at the antecedents of their courtship, he could but estimate Hester as a girl sorry for her engagement, and glad enough of an excuse to get rid of him—a girl who had known her own mind for the first time when she had made up that mind to dismiss him. He had not the remotest idea of any love for him having a place in her heart—for she had treated him badly, he considered, and cast him off, in the

old days, almost with scorn. All this for the best, for they had not understood one another, and had never been in love with each other; had he not been impulsive and foolish, they might have remained the best of friends all their lives.

Both glad to be free from a false position, they might be friends, he had thought very often—almost brother and sister in good time. For he did not believe that Hester had exaggerated a single fact in her frank confession to Milly—that confession had only come with a shock to the village girl, and he had been to blame to withhold it from her.

Hester and he *must* speak of Milly, for Hester might hold the clue to Milly's disappearance; if Mr. Fyvie's daughter were generous—and he felt that she would be—she would tell him all, calmly and coldly, as though it was a story that he had a right to hear, albeit it was of no great moment to herself.

It was not the thoughts of his coming interview with the old love that made his face so grave then.

All *that* had been considered long ago, but of Milly he could never tire of thinking. She had gone away from him without a word—she had not

cared to hear him in defence—she had torn herself rashly and foolishly from his arms. It was his fate to be distrusted, and he was not lucky in his loves. But where was she?—that was the crushing thought which brought the furrows to his brow—where had she flown, telling no one of her flight, and holding aloof from the friends in whom she might have put trust? When he found her, would she offer to explain her absence; and had he not a right to know where she had been, and in what company? He was enveloped in mystery, and he detested it. He was a man who loved the light of noonday on mundane matters, and though he would take Milly to his heart and forgive her all her doubts of him at once, yet he would ask her in return for all her confidence, and to have for ever afterwards a greater faith in him. He would tell her that she did not love him yet, as he loved her—and the last thought of that meeting—of her face before him, bright and radiant in its entrancing loveliness—suddenly cast a brighter gleam upon his own.

Mr. Fyvie leaned across and touched his knee.

“I wonder what you smiled for, Laurence?” he said,

"At the future, with all the misconceptions of the present trodden under foot."

"I wish that I could smile with you, then," he said; "as I get nearer home, I don't feel *quite* so lively as I did. I can't keep that boy out of my head."

"Jonathan?"

"Yes—I must tell his mother something about him. I must make the best of it somehow. It's a great deal to say," he whispered, "that he denies all knowledge of that woman."

"Yes."

"I'm inclined to believe that there is some mistake there. You will make inquiries for me, you say?"

"I will try and find Churdock, whom I saw last with Athorpe, on the night that it was supposed Athorpe's wife went away with Jonathan."

"He must know something," said Mr. Fyvie.

No more words were exchanged until they were in the main street of Tavistock, and then Mr. Fyvie said,

"Now for home, Laurence. After all, there *is* nothing like it!"

They went the whole length of the street, and a

short distance along the country road before the new home was reached—a pretty little villa, standing in its own small patch of garden ground.

“This is the old place reduced—according to scale,” he said, as he led the way along the garden-path towards the house. A trim servant-maid opened the door in lieu of the stately footman of old times, and Mr. Fyvie remarked that *that* was an improvement for the better, at least. Then along the narrow hall to a front room on the left—a well-furnished room in its way, with a few of the ornaments belonging to the drawing-room of Tavvydale House doing duty in their low estate. At the table, busy with her needle-work, the daughter who had been crossed in love!

“Hester, I have brought Mr. Raxford to say good evening to you,” her father said, as they came into the room.

Hester looked at him shyly, almost nervously; she changed colour as his name was mentioned, and said,

“I am glad to see you, and to thank you for all your kindness to my father.”

She extended her hand towards him, and Laurence was aware that it trembled in his own. It

was strange, he thought, that she should be more nervous than himself.

"I have but done my duty to your father—and that is a poor return for all his generosity."

"We make a great man of you here," said Mr. Fyvie, warmly; "for we are just beginning to understand you. This is the fellow, Hester, who would have given up the partnership when affairs were brightest, but who held fast to us in the storm and shipwreck."

"Yes—yes," said Hester, seeing that Laurence was discomfited by these encomiums; "and it was his duty, as he said just now."

"Take a seat, Laurence, and consider yourself at home. You are as welcome here as you were in the big house," he said, dropping into an easy-chair himself; "where's mamma, Hester?"

"She is not very well to-night."

"Dash it!—not fretting?" said Mr. Fyvie, with a scared look.

"No—she is resigned—I think that she is resigned to the change," corrected Hester; "but she said that she was very tired, and would go to bed."

"Better that, than sitting up full of anxiety as to the result of to-day's meeting."

"And the result?" asked Hester, looking full of anxiety herself for an instant.

"Is that we retire with dignity and honour from the mines," replied her father; "everybody satisfied, and nobody with anything to complain of—what can be better than that? Everybody content—Hester?"

"I hope so—I am."

"That's well—after all, a big house is not much to be proud of. I only want you and your mother to think that it has not been a very great drop."

"We could have dropped lower and not have hurt ourselves much," she said, with her old crispness of speech predominant.

"Exactly so."

Then there was a pause, after this little effort to sustain one another's courage, if it was an effort on Hester's part at all. For she had spoken naturally and cheerfully—and had evidently settled down to her surroundings already. Laurence looked attentively at Hester again; she might be resigned to the change; it might have improved and strengthened her character, as such changes will with the true breed of man and womankind, but it had not improved her personal appearance.

She was paler and thinner, and there was a greater degree of angularity about the features. Very graceful, and ladylike withal—and the subdued sadness of expression a new charm, that he had not expected to see there, and which took away from him the last faint feeling of resentment at her change of mind towards him. Had she met him coldly and proudly, he would have been a very iceberg in return; had she appeared before him the gay, sparkling woman whom he had known in their early days together, he would have resented her demeanour as a piece of coquetry, that was a jest at himself; but she had altered—she was subdued—and he was glad to see it, though he was sorry for the cause that had produced it. He was not sorry that he had come; he felt that he and she could speak seriously of Milly together, and that she might even feel an interest in his love story. He was not sorry, also, when Mr. Fyvie rose, stamped his feet upon the ground as though he were cold, and said,

“I think that I will go and speak to your mamma for a while. Put away your needlework, Hester, and try if Mr. Laurence be as good a chess-player as he used to be. Find a glass of wine for an old

friend, too; we are not without a good glass of sherry yet in the cellar—or the cellaret," he added, with a half grimace over his "quantities."

He hastened out of the room, and congratulated himself on having made his escape easily and naturally—and as the door closed behind him, the hearts of both man and woman beat more rapidly, for all their outward gravity.

There was a long silence; the moment had come for explanation, and Laurence sat and thought how it was best to begin a painful subject. Despite the double pulsations—which were a nuisance at that juncture, for they made him husky, and he was certain that he should croak like an old crow; he was firm and ready to speak of their past engagement; why he had kept it a secret from Milly, and why Hester had not—to speak of Milly, even to the woman sitting there, as one whom he loved best in all the world. Hester Fyvie was not equally firm; for she was a woman, and she was doubtful of the turn which he might give to the conversation. She could scarcely account for the presence of Laurence that evening; he had been a friend to them lately, and she was grateful for the rest, and forgave him in her heart all his trespasses against

her, just as he thought, that he was entitled to the glorious privilege of offering his forgiveness. But she became very nervous, and she trembled very much at last.

"I don't think that you or I care for chess this evening, Miss Fyvie," he said suddenly.

Yes—he was as hoarse as any raven in the country!

"No—I don't suppose we care at all."

One effort at her old quickness of reply, spoiled by the faltering accents of her voice. But the ice was broken, and they were soon more firm.

"I have been waiting long and anxiously, Miss Fyvie, for the opportunity of speaking to you, and I am very glad that it has come. I am sure that you will listen to me patiently, and if I pain you at all, that you will forgive me, and set it down to my natural anxiety."

Hester bowed her head. She was not certain what he was going to say next—he had been very noble and earnest lately, she was aware, and oh! if he had but brought back his truant love to her, to beg her to accept it, and forgive him!

"I am about to speak of Milly Athorpe—and

of that night you called upon her in Wind-Whistle Cleft."

"A memorable night for us," she answered, "and for more than you and me. Mr. Raxford, I acted cruelly on that night—unmaidenly—and I am sorry."

"I will beg you to relate to me the particulars of that interview between you and Miss Athorpe; for your visit has parted us—it has sown the seeds of suspicion between us, and she is very dear to me."

Hester's heart sank, and her colour changed once more. He confessed it; he had the cruelty to confess it to her, as though she had never been to him more than a common friend! She believed that misfortune had quelled her pride, and rendered her more womanly, but her spirit rose at this, and it was beyond her power to subdue it on the instant.

"Mr. Raxford," she said quickly, "I told Milly Athorpe the truth—but I was not gentle in my way of telling it. If for some purpose or other you kept that truth from her, I am not answerable for the mistakes that have arisen since. I am sorry—that is all."

"I did not tell her—pardon me for alluding to this—the particulars of our past unfortunate engagement. It was your father's wish, and there were reasons for respecting it."

"His wish?"

"I was wrong to keep that secret from her—I see that now," he said. "You, with more fearlessness, took that task upon yourself. Miss Fyvie, what did you say?—in what way did you tell her?"

"Don't ask me!" she entreated. "You can guess—you must know, sir."

"I thought that I could guess every word—for there are not two versions to the story—but your manner alarms me. I will ask you as a friend—even as a friend who was very dear to *me*—to tell me all, and set me on the track of Milly."

"I cannot do that—I know nothing of her movements. I told her all," she said, looking at him steadily; "but I told it like a spiteful woman, jealous of her conquest."

"You told her all."

"Everything."

"You told her that I asked you once to be my wife, Miss Fyvie—that you and I were engaged to be married, until you tired of me, and cancelled

the engagement? That it was a folly on your part!—a girlish folly of which you afterwards repented; and took in consequence the wisest, kindest step for both of us—a step backwards from your promise to me?”

“No, sir,” cried Hester, her eyes flashing now with all the fire inherent in them, her bosom heaving with its resistance to his injustice, her white hand clenched, like a man’s, upon the table at which she sat, looking across at him, proud and imperious as a queen. “I did not lie to preserve my womanly dignity, or spare myself one pang. I told her that you had grown tired of me, and were too ready to leap at the first excuse of a petty quarrel, and stand apart from all the love I had for you. That you did your best to win me—and winning me, to cast me off!”

“Miss Fyvie, I did not perpetrate an act so dastardly. You could not have told her that?”

“I did.”

“It was not honestly spoken,” said Laurence, warmly. “Oh, Miss Fyvie, it was unworthy of you. You were right—it was cruel and unmaidenly!”

For an instant she shrank from these bitter

words, as though they scared her; then she shook herself away from them, crying—

“I spoke the truth—I had a right to do it! For you had treated me cruelly—you had crushed me with your intensity of silence, when I was yearning for one word from you. You were unforgiving and hard—for it was you who had grown tired of me, whilst I—whilst I——”

She paused, and looked towards him with her gaze softening, and the tears stealing up to quench the fire with which her eyes were glowing; then she rose, trembling at the confession which had hovered on her lips, and stood by the mantelpiece with her back towards him, crying for very shame at the love which even then she could not hide.

“Miss Fyvie,” said Laurence earnestly, and more kindly, “what does this mean? How could you thus have misinterpreted my actions?”

“I—I will say no more.”

“Pardon me; but this is no explanation; and if you impressed Milly with your wrongs—it explains her honest indignation at my seeming treachery. For I was *not* false.”

“If it consoles you to believe that you were true to your word—if you can believe it—why

there the matter ends. They tell me that you are generous," she said ; " where is the generosity that prolongs this discussion ?"

" You have not told me all ?"

" Not quite all," she said, shivering at the reminiscence—" all to the purpose, save that she gave you up."

" Miss Fyvie, I cannot be generous when a charge against my honour is made—that would be cowardly to submit. I gave you up, you told her ?"

" Yes."

" When we quarrelled in the garden I gave you seven days to consider."

" Yes."

" Before that time expired, troubled by your silence, and scarcely able to reconcile it with your character—your love for me—I wrote to you."

" Yes," said Hester, for the third time.

" And you returned me no answer—at least, you sent me word that there was no reply."

Hester dashed the tears from her eyes, and looked at him intently. She could scarcely comprehend what he was saying yet, and she let him proceed, whilst she held her breath and listened.

"Your silence was a ratification of that previous dismissal, which, as an honourable man, I could not receive in a fit of petulance, born of a jealousy that was not worthy of you. But after a week's consideration, to let me know that there was no answer to my letter, was to remind me again of your wish to give me up, and I retired."

"Laurence, do you tell me—do you dare to tell me that I did not write to you?" she gasped forth.

"Not a line."

"That I did not ask you to come back to me, and take your place at my side again?—that I did not do all that was in my power to get you back?—and from that day to this we never met again. You—you must remember that I wrote to you?"

"I received nothing but a message, that there was no answer to my note," said Laurence, "and *you* tell me that you wrote!"

"There has been treachery at work to separate us!" cried Hester, wildly; "we have been deceived, then—there has been an enemy in our midst, for I wrote to you to come!"

Her hands dropped to her side, and she stood there with her head bent down upon her bosom,

a figure that was touching in its new misery—the misery that saw at last how she had been balked of her prize. It was a strange position, and Laurence felt it acutely. He saw that she loved him—that she had always loved him—and now his heart was beating for another woman, and there was no power on earth to bring him back to Hester. He had sworn to be true to her or to his promise until she gave him up, and she had never done so!

“Miss Fyvie, who is this enemy?” he said.

“I will find out,” was the reply; “I can guess.”

“He or she has worked irreparable harm,” he said, scarcely knowing what his words might imply to Hester, “and we must find the foe, for our own truth’s sake. I am very sorry.”

“I am very glad,” answered Hester, so quickly, that Laurence started in his amazement.

She saw his look of surprise, and blushed crimson at it. She hastened to explain.

“I am very glad, Mr. Raxford,” she repeated, “for it removes the stain upon your honour—and it lay like a foul brand between us. I am very glad that you did not lightly cast me off—however much your—your affection is centred on another!

Believing that I had acted lightly towards you, you were justified in seeking your happiness away from me, and I—I do not blame you now.”

“We acquit each other of all blame,” said Laurence. “I am glad of that result with you—but I am sorry for the pain, the suspense, the mistakes that have followed our separation.”

“Mr. Raxford, I have more to tell you,” said Hester, speaking, too, with more confidence, as his embarrassment became more evident, “for I have not yet spoken of my cruelty to Milly. I told her that—that I had not resigned you, and that you had never offered me your resignation. That *was* unmaidenly,” she continued speaking with great rapidity as she looked down at the carpeted floor, “and I was grieved at it, and at the anger which had given voice to it. I—I told her then that I would consider this still an engagement until you set me free by confessing your love to another woman—you have confessed it, and I set you free, sir, and wish you—my father’s friend and ours—with all my heart and soul, every happiness in life.”

She stretched forth her hands towards him, and he took them, and wrung them long and warmly

in his own. He had not the heart to say a word to her in reply, for every word must carry its sting with it.

"If, judging you falsely, I tried to mar that happiness—why, now I will do my best to promote it. You must not be," she said, rallying her forces very quickly, and speaking in her natural tone of voice, "the only generous being in Tavvydale. I have done wrong—and you must ask Milly to forgive me presently, and be a little generous also."

"Thank you, thank you," he said hurriedly; "if I can only find her."

Hester felt a stab at this wish, but she hid all signs of the pain that his words had caused. She must learn to bear well such "little slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

"I would ask one more question, Miss Fyvie—only I am troubling you very much."

"Not at all, now. I have confessed, and am at peace."

"Milly did not speak that night of going away?—of any steps that she might take consequent upon your avowal?"

"Not a word."

"I will go now—I think that I had better withdraw without seeing your father again."

"You will not forget him sometimes, Mr. Raxford," she said; "he will be very lonely in his retirement here—and very dull."

"I will not forget my friends," he answered.

Then he went away slowly and thoughtfully, but full of his one purpose, to find Milly. He had discovered at last the clue to her indignation against him, and the means were to his hand to turn it once more into love for him. One shade less of mystery before him, and he rejoiced at it, and forgot in his exultation the woman whom he had left sorrowing for the loss of him.

She was in tears again when Mr. Fyvie came downstairs to rejoin his friend.

"Why, where's Laurence?—why, what's the matter, Hester?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing," she said, "only that I am very happy."

"Happy! Why, surely he hasn't——"

"No, no," she cried impatiently, "don't guess like that, for I cannot bear it to-night. I am happy in the thought that he *was* worthy of me, and that it was my fault, not his, which brought about an

end to our engagement. And that's a bright thought, which will not grow dim with years."

"And he told you that, and didn't ask you to try him again?"

"Not he. Why he," with a little sigh, "is in love with Milly Athorpe now."

"Ah! I shall never understand you women," remarked Mr. Fyvie, sinking into his arm-chair; "you had better go upstairs and tell your mother all about it."

CHAPTER VI.

FOUND AT LAST.

LAURENCE slept at the inn at Tavvydale that night, or rather he tried hard to sleep and failed. The day's bustle crept into his brain and kept him busy—the revelation which had followed the day pressed hard upon it, mingled with his thoughts and added to their confusion. Lying on on his back, staring at the window at his bed's-foot, he could imagine that he was going mad like Oliver Athorpe—that there pressed too heavy a weight upon his mind to keep him sane. His own future was uncertain, but that was of little moment then ; his mother he had neglected lately, but that was an omission which she would readily forgive—he felt like a child now, who would like to tell his story to his mother, and feel his mother's arms round him, comforting him in his troubles. He had seen Hester Fyvie, heard the whole truth, and it had scared him.

If he could only have lain there and thought of one thing, he could have borne better the night's restlessness ; but though his meeting with Hester was ever foremost, there dashed across it all the day's business anxieties, and all the misty speculations of the morrow.

He was hearing Hester's confession ; he was becoming assured again that she loved him very dearly ; he could see her flushed face, her eyes full of indignation at her charge, and then full of love at his denial of it ; and yet they were talking of accounts, in that room at Plymouth, looking on the sea, Mr. Fyvie was sitting at the table, Engleton was busy with the creditors, and Jonathan Fyvie was coming into the room, tall and haggard. It was Jonathan Fyvie sitting with his father and himself shortly afterwards, raving of his best intentions, and his poor performance of life's duties, speaking of Inez Athorpe as of a woman who had not fled with him, but had been killed by her jealous husband ; and after that it was one stretch of trouble, with Milly vanishing further and further away from him—a speck of light upon the desert he was traversing.

If he could only sleep, and wake up in the

morning with a clearer head, to prosecute his search for Milly ; if he could but rest for a couple of hours, and forget the turmoil of the day ! But he was intensely wakeful, and everything was a trial to him ; the waiters in the inn wore creaking boots, and went up and down stairs in them, and vexed him with the noise they made ; people at the inn came home late, blundered about the passages in search of their numbers, and talked in loud voices to each other, talked even to themselves in their rooms, for the mere sake of talking ; there were dogs yelping in the streets without, and then, just as Laurence was losing himself, some wretch made a clattering row with a horse and cart in the inn yard, and drove off to an early market with his pigs.

It was three o'clock when he went off to sleep at last, and dreamed of the day's incidents, only confusing them a little more, and having the meeting of the creditors in Wind-Whistle Cleft, with the cascade splashing over the account-books, and Hester and Milly running in and out amongst the trees, pursued by Captain Athorpe, as raving mad as he had seen him on the day the house was fired.

He woke up tired and unrefreshed, and went

down-stairs to the coffee-room, where he attempted breakfast before setting forth in search of Bully Churdock. He had resolved to find that gentleman next, to hear the particulars of what had happened in the Cleft on the night Milly stole away, to ask if Milly had called upon her uncle to bid him good-bye before she started on her journey, and if she told him, or any one, in what direction she was tending. He began to think that he had not been quick enough in his conjectures, and that Churdock was the man to add his mite of knowledge towards the dissipation of the mystery. Milly would have seen her uncle, that was most likely. Seeing Churdock, too, would throw a light upon Jonathan Fyvie's story—for Churdock had been left in charge of Athorpe, and could answer at once as to the strange explanation that Jonathan had offered concerning Inez Athorpe. Was it possible, he thought, suddenly, that Inez had gone away with Milly, instead of with the tempter?—two women acting upon impulse, one flying from a husband's wrath, and the other from a lover whom she had been taught to doubt.

Laurence asked the waiter if he knew a man of the name of Churdock.

“Wrestling Churdock—Bully Churdock, sir?”

“Yes, the very man,” said Laurence.

“It’d be odd to live in Tavvydale, and not know him, sir,” affirmed the waiter. “What I call a pop’lar man is Bully. And not proud with it, sir.”

“No, I have never remarked much pride in him. Where does he live?”

“Up on the hills, at the back of the Cleft, sir, he and his mother and his little brother Johnny. It’s a long pull up there, and you’re more likely to find him in Tavvydale than at home.”

“He works at one of the mines, too—which mine?”

“Well, I think he’s given up the mining profession, sir,” remarked the waiter, twirling his napkin in his hands; “it was rather lowering for a pop’lar man, you see. And Bully’s won a match at Cornwall lately, and a gent from London who was there has offered Bully a capital opportunity of trying his luck in the ring. Did you ever see Bully fight, sir?”

“I have not had that pleasure,” said Laurence.

“He’s uncommon clever with his fives,” said the man, warming with his subject; “there’s regular genius in Bully. Ah! it’d be a fine thing to

say some day that a Tavvydale man was champion of England. I'm real Tavvydale, myself, sir."

"Oh! are you? Let me have the bill, please."

"And if you particularly wish to see Mr. Churdock, I'd advise you, sir, to wait here till he comes into the town. It's a long pull up the hill for nothing."

"I may meet him coming down," replied Laurence; "should I miss him, will you say that I will be back here at one, and that my business is of great importance?"

"Yes, sir—I will say so. Mr. Raxford, I think it is, of the Desperation mine?"

"Yes."

Laurence paid his bill and went out into the high-street. It was a bright morning, and the place was as lively as the absence of its thousands of mining population could make it. All the women too old, and all the children too young for work, all the shopkeepers who were not busy behind their counters, and all the dogs that had made the place resonant with noise last night were at the open doors, or on the pebbly ridges of the footpaths. Laurence walked briskly down the middle of the road, and when out of the village,

stepped from the beaten track, and made at once across the moorland for the hills beyond.

On the summit of the hill forming one side of the Cleft, he should be able to look across the higher ground, and see the Churdock cottage, he thought, and he pined for the fresh air that would meet him there, and drive his headache away. On the wild land that he was crossing, he came upon an old man with sheep, and hailed him.

“Churdock’s cottage—is it up the tor, there?”

“Ay!—ay!—up the tor—the one by the Cleft—a long way over, sir. Nobody goes to see Bully very often,” he added, with a grin upon his withered face; “but it’s a fine air up there, and that’s made Bully such a wonder!”


Yes, Bully Churdock was evidently a popular man—a man who was respected in the country.

Laurence ascended the hill-side, finding it warm work after awhile, and pausing to take breath now and then, as the ascent became more steep and arduous. The view opened out to him as he looked upwards, and it was a fine stretch of Devonshire country, that rewarded him for the labour of his ascent, when he was standing on the summit of the hill, and the wind was rioting around him.

"Dear old Devon!" he murmured; "I should have been happy here, had I not been precipitate and foolish."

He looked towards a patch of woodland a few miles away on the plain beneath, but seeming as if he could throw a stone into it, and spoke as though he thought from Tavvydale House had arisen all the misconceptions of his life; then he walked a little way onwards, and gazed from the high steep side of the tor into the mass of foliage shooting upwards, and far beneath which was the Cleft where Milly had lived.

Around him on every side was a fair landscape, and he could take hope again to his heart—hope born of the beauty of the scene, and the freshness of that autumn morning. Within a little circle, comprising but a small part of that fairy land beneath him, and in the course of a few months he had met all the romance of his life, and all the joys and sorrows born of that romance. It might make a story for an idle hour or two some day, with readers to pity his career, beginning so fairly and ending in the mists—or readers to rejoice with him at the brightness which followed the dilemmas, and the reward which came to him with the last



chapter, when he should be married, and lady-readers would care no more about him.

If it would only end as he wished it—if he could but guess the end, and find the village girl with love and faith in him again. But he had a search to make, and he was not lucky in his quests—why, he could not see Bully Churdock's cottage even now !

He walked on across the table-land thinking of Milly, and exulting at least in his freedom from "the books" at which he had toiled so long. No more accounts—no fighting more with figures—no sitting down to desk-work, or supervising of shafts, and miners and samples of copper ore, until his path ahead wore less perplexity. He was free now, and his own master, and he trod with an elastic step the short, crisp carpet which Nature spreads over her Downs. Free at last ; free to go where his thoughts directed him, with no one to remind him that his duty lay in a different direction ! Free as the winds of heaven that rioted on the high hills on which he wandered. Yes, surely the worst was over, and the better times were coming !

Far off, some distance across the Downs, Lau-

rence's quick eye detected some smoke curling upwards in the clear sky. He was approaching the place rapidly; he could see the roof of a small house or shed peering above a slight dip in the surface—a hollow which the sheep knew well, for here they nestled at times, out of the way of the wind. The place was stony hereabouts, however, and the scanty herbage struggled hard to live.

Laurence, when he had reached the outer ring of this hollow, discovered that he had descended a little way, and that the other side concealed the cottage from his view once more. He was about to make a short cut across this hollow, when he became aware of a man lying complacently on his back at the bottom of this natural basin, with two huge hands crossed on his chest, in monumental effigy style, and with a felt hat cocked over his eyes, to keep the sun out. The length of limb and solidity of form suggested Bully Churdock on the instant, and Laurence called his name.

The figure moved, took the cap from his face, sat bolt upright, and stared sleepily at Laurence standing on the brink of the hollow beyond. Yes, it was Churdock, red-eyed, red-faced, and sinister.

Laurence was at his side the instant afterwards.

"I am very pleased to find you, Churdock. I have come up from Tavvydale in search of you."

Churdock's face did not light up at Laurence's propinquity—it might have assumed a shade or two of greater stolidity even, for the giant was not pleased to see the gentleman. That last fact was evident when he replied, with a low growl,

"I don't see what you want with me."

"You *will* see that."

"I don't know what business of mine is any business of yours, Mr. Raxford—it never was—and it can't never be."

"I think that I may interest you in my own, at all events."

"I'm dorned if you can, though!" he said; "for you're nothing to me."

"I thought that we were better friends than this, Churdock," said Laurence; "but you speak as an enemy might speak to a man who had injured him."

"You've done that fast enough. You turned the gal's head by making love to her; and I ain't blind enough not to know now that you was making fun of her all the blessed time."

"You are alluding to Milly Athorpe—I wish to speak of her, Churdock."

"She's given you the go-by. What's she to do with you now?"

"She is everything to me. I hope that she will be my wife, Churdock—that's all."

"You hope so. Well," with an oath that escaped him in his surprise, "gin you get her, you're a cleverer man than I take you for."

"When did you see her last?—you must have seen her since that night I left you in charge of Captain Athorpe at his cottage?"

Bully did not answer. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and looked at Laurence contemptuously.

"You must have seen her, or your words could not have a meaning to me," he said. "Well, I *will* ask you, Churdock, to tell me when you saw her, how she was looking, and what she said of me? She is unhappy, and the cause is easily removed. She is the victim of a great mistake, and I would rectify it. There, I am talking to you, as I would scarcely talk to another man in the world. For you may know where Milly is; and if so, you will be my friend, Churdock, I am sure."

Laurence spoke earnestly, and Churdock was not proof against this genuine outburst. He kept his eyes fixed on Laurence, swayed uneasily from side to side, swallowed something in his throat, which came up again and had to be reswallowed, finally burst forth with—

“Nobody’s told me much—all I know I guessed myself—and that’s that you and Milly was sweet-hearts, and now isn’t. That’s your fault, not her’n.”

“It is all a mistake—Milly has been deceived, Churdock.”

“As it may be,” said Bully Churdock, quite argumentatively, “possible like, though you’re out o’ my style quite, and I don’t know. And you ain’t like that dorned sneaking sarpent who has done such harm about here. Sorry all the same, mind you, that you ever knew her—that you couldn’t a-found somebody in the big places to take a fancy to, instead of one of our’n—but having happened so, and you all square—why, there’s an end on’t, if you *is* all square. You talk as if you meant it—and though *I* didn’t think till jest now—why oo I”

Bully Churdock took his hands from his pockets

to snap his thick fingers in the air, then he rose to his feet and shook himself violently, like a great dog—and a great and faithful watch-dog this Devon wrestler had been of late days.

“You’ve turned up lucky like,” he said. “A week ago and I mightn’t have done nothing, save pitch you down into the Cleft ayont for poking and prying in this part of the hills. But things is better, and p’raps they’ll be glad to see ye.”

“*They*—is Milly here, then? At your cottage?”

“She was this morning. Here she be now, with the rest of ’em.”

Laurence turned quickly to look in the same direction as Bully Churdock—to look with intense bewilderment at the strange cortege coming towards him from the house upon the hills. Whatever happened in the future, the mystery was at an end at least, and for that let him be thankful. The reality was better than the suspense—even if the former hewed down that tree of promise planted in the brighter days. He thought so then, before he knew all—before that pale-faced, beautiful girl had faced him with her strength of will.

It was a strange cortege, then; a woman at death’s door still—lingering yet on the threshold,

clinging hard to life, and praying night and day that she might live a little longer—a woman led between James Whiteshell and Milly, who were careful of every faltering step made towards the dip in the land where the air was less intense. Following behind them little Johnny Churdock with a stool, and a gaunt, ropy old woman, evidently Churdock's mother, with pillows in her arms. The woman in the centre needing all this care changed very much from the dark-faced, Spanish-looking beauty whom Laurence had known as Athorpe's wife—the shadow of her past self, who might steal away like a shadow from them even yet, so weak and helpless seemed she.

Laurence made a step towards them, but Churdock's hand was on his arm immediately.

"Don't fluster her who's ill, Mr. Raxford. *She* sees you—they see you—that's enough!"

Yes, Milly had seen him; the colour had mounted to her face, and was lingering there still, though her eyes were fixed upon the ground now. Mr. Whiteshell had seen him, and was holding up his head defiantly, as though appearances were against him; but he should clear himself presently, and overwhelm his adversary completely. Inez Athorpe

was looking at him with a piteous, beseeching expression, that implored him not to speak to her just then, but to leave her to herself.

Her lips moved, and Milly bent down her head to hear her.

"Yes," he heard her say, "we will send him away at once."

"I will see to that," Whiteshell added; then he beckoned to Churdock, who changed places with him as they came down the slope towards the bottom of the ring.

"You will step back, Mr. Raxford," said Whiteshell, in a tone verging on peremptory; "you don't want to excite Mrs. Athorpe, whom an angry word would kill just now?"

"I will step back, of course," said Laurence, retiring with Mr. Whiteshell, as the rest approached; "but I will not lose sight of Milly till I have spoken to her. It looks as though I have been treated badly by you all," he added, with some little signs of vexation in his voice.

"Or all of us—all who know and love Milly—have been treated badly by you."

"I was not trusted—and I deserved to be heard in a serious charge against my honour, sir."

They were out of hearing of the rest of them, but Laurence, from the higher ground, could see Milly still bending over her aunt, and arranging the pillows and cushions for her.

Mr. Whiteshell glanced upwards at his taller companion, put his fingers nervously to his lips, and said,

"If—if—you shouldn't be so bad now, oh! you don't know, Mr. Raxford, how pleased I should be, for one!"

"You, knowing all this," said Laurence, warmly, "where Milly was, and with whom, could come to me with your false excitement and your lies, to add to my misgivings, when a word would have saved me weeks of agony!"

Mr. Whiteshell changed from white to red at this reproach, at the sudden manner in which the tables had been turned against him, and he compelled to stand upon defence.

"I did not know, sir, what had become of Milly—I was full of trouble concerning her when I came to you. Afterwards, on the same night, I found her at her house, whither she had stolen for some things she wanted. I—I hope that you may be able to answer with as clear a conscience as that, sir."

"You told me that you would write to me."

"If I thought you honest—which I could not afterwards."

"It is all easily explained."

"Then——"

"I will explain to her who has a right to hear me first," said Laurence. "I am waiting for her very anxiously."

"I will send her to you at once," said White-shell; "it is better over, perhaps. You see now why she has been absent from the Cleft?"

"Yes, I think that I see it all," said Laurence. "Express my regrets to Mrs. Athorpe at meeting her like this."

"Poor woman!—struck down when she was at her best—when she had the strength to turn away from the villain who had tempted her so long—and struck down by her husband. He always was a little rough!" he added.

"Yes—yes—will you tell Milly that I am waiting here?"

He was not curious concerning the story of Inez Athorpe; his own fate was trembling in the balance, perhaps, and Milly still distrusted him. He was sorry for Mrs. Athorpe—he would be glad

to be of service to her presently, if it were in his power ; but every minute away from Milly now—with her before him, and with those cruel thoughts of him which Hester Fyvie had sown within her mind—was torture.

“I will go at once. And you *can* clear yourself?”

“Or I should not have come,” said Laurence.

“I—I believe you again. Somehow, I can’t look at you, young man, and see any harm in you,” said Mr. Whiteshell. “And there really was no engagement with that Fyvie minx, and——”

“Mr. Whiteshell, I am waiting for Milly!”

The old gentleman bustled away, and Laurence stood, with the fresh breeze playing round him, waiting very anxiously, and yet very hopefully, for the old love and trust to come to him again.

Milly was at his side before he was aware of it. He had looked down for an instant to consider how he should commence his explanation, and conclude it as quickly as he could, for the sake of the after bliss awaiting him, and she had come across the dip of land, and was at his side when he looked up again.

“Mr. Raxford,” she said, very firmly, and not

flinching from the loving, sorrowful gaze directed towards her, "you wish to speak to me again, then?"

"Yes, Milly. I think that I have a right."

Then they walked together, side by side, silently for awhile, till they were away from the group near the cottage, and there was only heaven to hear them.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUND IN VAIN.

YES, Milly was looking very firm. If he had been bold enough to seek her out—why, she must face him, for once more in life. He *had* a right to ask the reasons for her separation from him; he might explain part of the mystery which had baffled her, remembering what he was, and how truthful and earnest he had ever seemed to her; and though it could not alter her determination to be quit of him, it would be pleasant to think that he had not jested in his love-making. There was the hope, too, that he might explain all away, and shine before her with that undimmed lustre in which her loving heart had placed him—that would add, that would complete, the sweetness of the reminiscence, and comfort her throughout the life she had resolved upon. It would not draw him nearer to her ever again, alas!—but it would render her content for ever afterwards.

All this, which was passing in her mind, he could not guess at. He believed in his power to shiver with his love the brittle wall of glass which circumstances had raised between them; there was not anything could stand the shock of the truth, now that he was face to face with her at last.

Possibly it was good policy to begin with the old half reproach, it prepared Milly for a better judgment of him. Had he been wholly unworthy of her, they could have parted without an explanation, and she would have been wretched all her life. But his first words brought back to her the hope that she had had of him—hopes that had seemed based on nothing—amidst the suffering in which her new lot was cast, and the sterner, deeper thoughts that were distressing her.

“Milly, you might have listened to me, instead of writing me that letter,” he said; “the veriest wretch before his judges is asked what he has to say in his defence.”

“I was hasty, perhaps,” she confessed, “but I was heart-broken, and it all seemed unanswerable to me. It seems so now.”

“I will explain at once,” he said.

“I shall be glad to hear that you were not false

to—to Miss Fyvie,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation; “and, Mr. Raxford, though no explanation that you can offer me can place us in our old positions towards each other, still it will take a great weight from me to believe that you did not intentionally mislead me.”

Laurence did not like her reply, or the coldness of the tone in which it was conveyed. There was a hardness in her manner that was new to him, and that warned him all might not end as he desired.

He dashed at once into his explanation. He told her all that of which the reader is aware, and which he would not thank the narrator for repeating *in extenso*. It was the story which has taken us two-thirds of our journey to relate—the rash engagement out of gratitude to Hester Fyvie—the quarrel between the lovers—Hester’s missing letter, that was to bring him to her side again, and which had never reached the hands of him to whom it was addressed—the love for Milly starting forth in the days of his new liberty—their engagement—his promise to Mr. Fyvie to spare Hester’s feelings—the consequences that had followed his silence.

It was told very rapidly, and very briefly, and

Milly listened patiently, and with her form trembling more than once as he went on, firm as she had determined to be throughout their interview. For he spoke much of his love for her, and without a word it would have been evident enough to Milly. He could tell her again that he had only loved her, and that without her she left his life a blank ; he could dwell upon the misery that she had caused him, until Miss Fyvie had thrown a light upon the mystery ; he would have flung his arms round her, and begged her to have new faith in him, from that day, knowing how true he had been to her, and how well-meaning was the error which had parted them—had she not suddenly stepped back from him.

“Milly !” he cried, “have I erred beyond all hope of pardon ?”

“No, Laurence,” and the mention of his Christian name was to make his heart leap again with joy ; “the little that there is to pardon, I am very glad and grateful to forgive. But we stand—both of us—beyond all hope of ever being—the—same—to—one—another !”

Her voice sunk lower as she uttered that sentence against him, and she paused between every word

that escaped her; but she was very firm still.

"No—no, Milly—I cannot believe that, unless you have wholly ceased to love me."

"May I speak of you before I speak of myself?" she asked; "I have not much to say."

"Speak to me all that is in your thoughts against me, and let me combat it with my love for you, which must break down everything opposed to it."

Milly shook her head sadly, and then went on—
not meeting his face, and not speaking perhaps so firmly.

"Laurence—I will call you Laurence," she said, in explanation, "as I would a dear brother or true friend—you do not consider that you asked a woman of your own station in life—a woman more fitting for you than ever I should have been—to become your wife? You asked her—you bent her thoughts towards you, and away from others who might have loved her better, and been, pardon me, more faithful—you gave a colour to her whole life and life's thoughts—you led her to love *you*, at least. Well, are you not bound in honour to her?—are you justified as a gentleman in setting her aside?"

"I do not love her."

"But you told her so," said Milly; "you pledged your word that you did love her, and you were engaged to her. I think that if I—if I—had been a man to say what you have said, even feeling now as you feel towards her, I would have *forced* myself to love and cherish her, rather than wholly crush her by casting her away."

"I do not love her," repeated Laurence, gloomily; "and I should make her unhappy by a marriage with her. I was to blame—I have not forgiven myself—but I should add to my mistake and hers, if I renewed this rash engagement, or she was foolish enough to give me her assent to it. Milly, it is unnatural to reason thus, for I have set my soul on you. And you would force me into the arms of another woman!" he cried, passionately.

"I was thinking what I might do if I was in your place," said Milly, less resolutely; "I may be wrong—I have only just thought of this—and you have never loved her, you say?"

"No. I see that—I know that, now," he answered.

"She was badly treated," said Milly, thoughtfully.

"But, Milly, I have explained all this—how gratitude for her father's kindness——"

"Rendered you unjust," concluded Milly; "yes, you have explained that. We will not speak of it—I am not her champion—I am glad, at least—there, I own it," she added, quickly, "that you were not false to me, and that one bitter memory the less passes away from this day."

"To be replaced, Milly——"

"Oh! Laurence, you must let me speak now—speak of myself, whilst I am strong and resolute!"

He met her imploring look, and was silent. He had less hope after meeting those earnest, sorrowful eyes—less hope, now the great barrier between them was broken down for ever.

"Had you not been engaged to Miss Fyvie—had you never seen her," she corrected, as Laurence stamped impatiently upon the turf, "I should have asked you this day to forget me—to make up your mind, Laurence, to consider me as standing apart from you for ever."

"It cannot be done. You have accepted me. You have told me that you loved me, Milly!"

"You must not think of that any more," said

Milly, sadly ; "but go back to your own sphere, and find the wife more suitable for you. It was an unsuitable match from the beginning, and my heart sank at it, Laurence ; for I was *not* fit for you, and your friends would have ridiculed your choice, and stung your pride at every turn, making me miserable with you."

"We have spoken of this before," said Laurence, "and I have shown the folly of this reasoning."

"Perhaps I need not have mentioned it again," said Milly, humbly accepting her reproof. "I bring it back to say that now in the end—facing the end of our romance together, Laurence—the match is *entirely* unsuitable, and would, by its continuance, result but in misery to us both."

"I do not see that."

"I could have brought into your family——"

"My family !" he cried scornfully.

"I could have said to that mother who loves you, and is very proud of you, that I brought for my dowry a name that was spotless, and that my uncle and aunt—well known in Tavvydale, and very much respected—could speak for me, and say that I was worthy of her son. Now—the

blight is on all of us, and there is no cutting it away."

"There is nothing in the world that can stand between you and me for an instant."

"Ah! but there is, Laurence," said Milly. "They are talking in Tavvydale of my Aunt Inez, and how she ran away with Jonathan Fyvie."

"That is false. It can be proved——"

"It can be proved, perhaps," said Milly, "that she did not run away, because her husband met them in the Cleft, and tried to kill them both."

"But she?" asked Laurence.

"*She* was urging Jonathan Fyvie to leave her, and was returning full of faith—full of her sense of duty to her husband's home, when my uncle, mad with passion, full of his past suspicions, dashed upon them. That is her story, which I believe—but which the world would laugh at. The world has heard of this long intrigue, and has condemned her."

"The world has condemned unjustly many times—why should you and I study the world?"

"We are living in it, and have bread to earn," answered Milly; "and it takes time to live down a slander like this."

"It is neither yours nor mine."

"I share it with her—I am an Athorpe," said Milly. "But I share with her a greater fear than that even—the fear that she should die, and that my uncle should be called her murderer."

"You have lived up here apart from the world, until your mind is full of disordered fancies, Milly," said Laurence. "I will hope still—I will never surrender you."

"Inez was carried up here by Churdock, at her wish, out of the way of my uncle, who believed that he had killed her. In the morning, when I was ready to go to London, when I had returned from making arrangements at Tavvydale School, Churdock came to me, and told me that Inez was dying at his mother's house. She had only one wild hope to die there, unknown to anyone, and save her husband from arrest; to give him time to get away out of England before the news went down into the village that he had slain her. Better be it said for a little while that she had gone away with Jonathan Fyvie, than that her husband should suffer, she thought. She forgot herself, and thought of him, at last. I remained with her—I nursed her night and day—and she is better now. The

doctor, who has kept our secret well, says that she will be always very weak—always require constant attention, and unceasing watch ; and I have taken that task upon myself, for I am the one friend left her.”

“If I——” began Laurence, when she interrupted him again.

“It is a hard task—I do not deny that,” said Milly ; “but I have begun it cheerfully, and I shall not shrink from it, I am sure. My duty, Laurence, is to part with you, for my own sake—for yours—for hers !”

In his bitter disappointment—in the first agony of his baffled hopes to win her—stung, as it were, by the assurance that Milly would not swerve from this new duty—he cried impatiently,

“You have no right to sacrifice your life for that woman’s—she was always selfish, vain, and weak—and she will make a slave of you.”

“She is the wife—the honest wife, after all—of my poor uncle. Would you advise me to desert her ?”

“There is Mr. Whiteshell,” suggested Laurence—“he——”

“He is a very poor man ; and if he was a very

rich one, he is not fit to be a weakly woman's nurse. I shall be in my old place as school-mistress, I hope; and with that salary, and my little savings, I will take care of Inez till my uncle comes."

"He will never come back."

"I will pray with all my might that he may—pray with Inez, who will die very unhappily should he keep away."


"He is mad."

"His better thoughts will come back, for he is a thoughtful man. He will not go wholly to ruin, and when he knows all the truth he will not wholly despair."

"Still, all this need not separate us," urged Laurence; "you must not make every sacrifice for your aunt, you must let me share all your sorrows, and your trials, as I should have done if we had been married."

"No, no, it can't be," cried Milly. "I will never bring my husband a single care to the altar. I will be all joy to him, or I will never marry. And I shall never, never marry now, Laurence!"

"Ah! Milly, you will love me—you *will* love me still!"



"Yes, I will love you, Laurence," she sighed forth, "with a far-away love, that shall keep you apart from me, and yet ever in remembrance. For I can't forget—I never shall forget you. But as surely as I love you, as I am very glad that I have not loved unworthily, so surely must you say good-bye to me now, and feel yourself, from this day, free of any promise to me."

She held out her hands towards him, and he seized them and drew her at once into his arms, where she remained for an instant, and let him kiss her passionately. Then she sprang away from him, and was crying very much, and sobbing forth "Good-bye" again.

"No, no, it *is* not good-bye," cried Laurence; "it is not a parting to which I can consent—it is not right! For we love each other, and should have hope in the future together."

"That would unsettle me," said Milly, turning quickly to explain, and dashing her tears away amidst her explanation; "that might render my duty irksome, after awhile, and *she* would see that, and fret at my selfishness. I have promised to take care of her for life. I will go down with her to Tavvydale, and tell them all there that I am her

friend, because she has been true to her husband ; and though they will not believe that at first, I will, in time, force the truth upon them. Though she has ever been a strange and jealous woman, she has loved me I know now, and I will show my gratitude for it. And, should she get stronger—which she may, in good time, and with God's help!—and we should hear in any way of my uncle, we two women will set forth in search of him, to tell the whole truth, and make his heart more light by it. And if he never comes—if we never see him again—why, then I must comfort her through life, in the best way that I can.”

“Can I say anything to all this, save that I will wait for you,” said Laurence ; “that year after year, taking pattern by your patience and unselfishness, I will bide my time for Milly !”

Her lip quivered again, and she wrung her hands silently together, as though that was a check upon her tears.

“You must not,” she murmured.

“There may come an early sequel to this discomfort,” said Laurence ; “strange are the ways of life, and full of changes. I will wait !”

“If I thought that you were waiting for me—

that I was shadowing your life like this—it would make me very, very wretched. Laurence, you will marry some one better than myself—a lady, well bred, well born—and not think of me any more. For I will never have you!”

“Milly!” he cried.

“There, I have said it! I will never have you, Laurence—I could never come to you without some drawbacks to my name and *theirs*—and I have mapped my life out to the end. You shall not burden your mind with thoughts of me—me, growing old before my time, and thinking from this day no more of you.”

“Only a little while ago, and I was to be kept ever in remembrance,” Laurence reminded her.

“There, there! you torture me—you are not kind,” said Milly; “ever in remembrance as a hero of my books, then—the hero of my one romance! But to think of you as—as—as I *have* thought of you, Laurence, why, never again, as I am a woman who has suffered.”

“I will wait,” repeated Laurence, firmly.

“For the true wife whom you will meet in your own circle, and be happy with,” said Milly; “for here we say ‘Farewell!’”

If her cheek had paled still more, she had assumed all her old firmness. Would she soften ever again towards him?—was it the girl who had let him enfold her in his loving clasp?—or was it the woman, cold and grave, whom he was henceforth to meet?

Should he meet her again?—were they to be friends or strangers? That last question he put at once.

“I may stay in Tavvydale?—I may go back to my old post at the mines? Shall we meet at times by chance, and may I speak to you?”

“I hope that you will not. I ask you in all charity towards me not to seek me out. It will not be fair or kind to do so. You will go now,” she urged; “I have been long away, and Inez is very weak and nervous. You will say good-bye, Mr. Raxford, now?”

“Ah! no longer ‘Laurence’ to you! For you are as unfaithful to your word, as I was to Hester Fyvie.”

“And the last parting comes with a reproach!” said Milly—“well, think that I have treated you badly—it is best for both, perhaps.”

“God bless you, my own unselfish Milly!” cried

the repentant Laurence. "I am a villain, and you must not mind me now. I am in despair, and - know not what I am saying, what is happening around me, save that you are going away for ever, and that all the love you had for me—that you confessed to me in the Cleft—goes with you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Milly—for the last time you will call me Laurence in return?"

"Yes, Laurence, good-bye."

Yes, this was true love, not the every-day article passing for the same in every-day life, but the love which belongs to real life sometimes, for all that—to the very young, and the very true, who are born with poets' souls in them, perhaps, and know but little of SOCIETY—the love of which true poets have spoken in verse, and to which verse gives a tinge of reality when prose labours hard for effect. The love that has the wings of the angel, and hovers between heaven and earth, fluttering between the pure thoughts of heaven and its worshippers, but rendering earth, whilst love lasts, a garden of Eden.

It was a wild moment of bliss, even on the verge

of separation, when this strange couple, parting thus strangely, gave up for the instant their hardness, their resolves, and met in one close embrace, to kiss each other for the last time as lovers. If, looking back upon it, it added to the grief of their disunion, still it was a fair retrospect, that made their hearts thrill, and kept them green and young. Fate had separated them—not themselves.

She watched him down the slope of the hill, going back to a new life, which she could never share with him. And, like a true woman, she prayed that her hero would be ever happy without her!

END OF BOOK THE THIRD.

BOOK IV.

THE OLD LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

A NEW BEGINNING.

LAURENCE left Tavvydale for a week. He was unsettled and troubled—he had been disturbed so long by the anxiety which affected others as well as himself—he had struggled so hard towards the end of mystery, and, attaining it, had been so utterly cast down, that he craved for change, for isolation from his old world, as a life prisoner in a dungeon might crave for liberty.

He set off, with a small knapsack at his back, across the country, tramping from South to North Devon in a day, and arriving in the middle of the night, tired, weary, and footsore, at the old village of Hartland. There he rested for the week, lying all day in the shadow of the gaunt sea-cliffs, watching the play of the waves over the sunken rocks, and looking out at sea long and steadily, as though at his future beyond the line where the sky and

ocean met. Here no one could step from his post to meet him—here, free from his old world, he felt that it would be a pleasure to dream away his life. This on the first day after his arrival; on the second more calm in mind, looking out at sea more gravely and intently, as though life's duties were coming back to him with a sense of their importance, and would be in the bay presently.

If Laurence Raxford was romantic, still it was not the romance of the fool ignoring real life, and conjuring up phantoms at every step. He was philosophic in some respects; he could make the best of circumstances, and he was not a slave to one grief.

He felt that he was a part of the world in which he must live, and, if possible, prosper; he had business ideas, and they were not likely to rust long in inaction. The rest at Hartland did him good—for it was a complete rest, and when the week had expired, he could shoulder his knapsack, and trudge back to Tavvydale, all the better for the change, and all the stronger in his purposes and in himself.

He would accept Mr. Engleton's offer—if it were still open for him to accept—and go back to his old post at Wheal Desperation; he would try

and be a son to the old man who had given up, in all honour, his great possessions, and a brother to the woman whom he had not treated well—who was the only one in all the world that could accuse him of a broken promise, and who had, for all that, readily forgiven him. He would summon his mother to Devonshire, to make that home for him which he had never found there ; that home wherein he would settle down, thanking God for the true friend, adviser, and sympathizer left him in the world yet, and to whom, though he had written once or twice, he had never related the story of his love for Milly. He would work on patiently, doing his duty everywhere, and from the distance he would watch Milly Athorpe with all his heart and soul, trustful of better times, and, failing them, to grow old and grey-haired with her, but loving her to the last as fondly as when the magic of her beauty first entranced him.

He would say nothing of that last resolution, for it was stagey, and no one—save Milly, perhaps—would understand him ; but he would keep to that, as to all the rest of the plans which we have set above, as part and parcel of his resolutions. He wrote to his mother on the first day of his return

to Tavvydale ; he wrote to Mr. Engleton ; he called upon Mr. Fyvie, and saw that gentleman, his wife, and daughter—the gentleman still buoyant, and more than resigned, outwardly, to all the changes which had come to him—and he walked over to Wheal Desperation in the evening, looked at the old place, and wondered if his lot was to be cast there after all.

The answers to his letters arrived in due course—they were both answers in *propria persona* ; Mrs. Raxford and Mr. Engleton appearing within half an hour of each other before the startled Laurence.

“I couldn’t stay a moment, Laurence,” said Mrs. Raxford, “after your letter. I have been packed up this last month, and ready to fly here at the first signal—which you have been a long while making, my dear.”

“Ah ! that is easily accounted for, mother. I told you in my last, I think, of the failure of the firm—the run of ill-luck that followed the advent of the new partner.”

“Yes, my dear boy—very terrible—and that accounts for your rambling letters, full of little hints of coming changes, which you said would be

all for the best, which they can't be, surely."

"Patience, we shall see, mother. Everything is for the best, I suppose."

"That's my own son. Glad to see you, Laurence, contented with everything. Well, have you found a little house for me, in which I shan't feel myself quite lost after your marriage?"

"I have found a little house for you and me, mother—for you alone, if I have to seek my fortune elsewhere—and for both of us to settle down in, if an offer made me by the new proprietors is once more renewed."

"To settle down in?—both of us?"

"There's the riddle that I am going to solve," he said, attempting a smile at his mother's perplexity; "now, sit still, and listen to my love-story."

Then he told her all for the first time—all that he was only just acquainted with himself, and which had separated him as far from Milly Athorpe as from Hester Fyvie.

The mother listened patiently—open-mouthed, in fact—shed tears over all the pathetic pictures, like a tender-hearted woman as she was, and wound up by flinging herself headlong at Laurence,

putting her arms round him, and patting his back with her little fat hands, as though he was choking.

"How the girls have been worrying you, my poor boy!" she said; "I suppose it's quite natural at your age—poor Hester!—poor Milly!—what a mix-up to be sure, and nobody to blame!"

"Yes—I am to blame."

"But you did love Hester at first—I'm sure I never saw two young people take to each other more—and now Milly has given you up, like a sensible young woman who knows her place, and wants to keep it—it may all come round again, just as Hester's father and myself prophesied it would."

"No—that can't be. I beg you not to think of that—all I ask of you is to leave me to myself."

"Of course, I shouldn't attempt to interfere."

"Then we'll go and look at the house that there is to let within a stone's throw of Mr. Fyvie's," said Laurence.

"Ah! that will be nice—nice," she added, detecting Laurence's suspicious look towards her, "to have a neighbour not quite a stranger to us."

"Yes."

"And if you never marry, Laurence, it is not

for me to complain—me who will have you all to myself, if you don't. We shall be very comfortable, and with you on my mind instead of my house property—it's in the hands of a most respectable agent, Laurence, who will not deduct much for repairs—I shan't know a single care."

"That's well."

They were going away arm-in-arm to see the little house at once, when Mr. Engleton arrived and delayed the excursion. He was full of bustle and excitement, as usual, and his pockets and his hands as full of papers.

"Glad to see you—glad to see you in Devonshire again, Mrs. Raxford," he said, upon entering; "and glad, Raxford," turning to our hero, "to receive your letter, which I should have answered before, had I not been very busy about some model cottages I intend to build in Tavvydale. You remember my old ideas about the cottages?"

"Ye—es," said Laurence, hesitating a little; "I remember something about cottages, but the details have escaped me."

"I'll just give you a sketch."

Then he sat down, and dashed into the subject of his model cottages, which, now he was firmly

established as a Devonshire celebrity, he should certainly build in Tavvydale forthwith. Laurence and his mother listened for half an hour or so, until the speaker detected some signs of weariness in the lady, who had come a long journey that day.

"But we're getting too dry and business-like, and fatiguing Mrs. Raxford," said Engleton, suddenly; "and, besides, there's your business to attend to, in the first place. Well, I have settled all that—I'll have you at your own terms. How much?"

"My remuneration must be left to the proprietary."

"Oh! hang the proprietary. We had a meeting last week and a quarrel—some objections being raised to expending a few thousands on my new principle of ventilating mines—for it's as stuffy as possible down there at present, and how the poor beggars can keep on breathing, I can't understand—and so I made them an offer, and bought the lot of them out. What I hadn't got myself, my bankers were good enough to find me; and so," with a pleasant laugh breaking in upon his rapidity of utterance, "I am sole proprietor of

Wheal Desperation, and you must try and make it pay a fellow."

"It will pay a fair per centage on the capital," said Laurence; "there is no doubt of that."

"Well, I hope I'm not greedy—a fair per centage will do," was the reply; "and to show my principle of conducting business, I should like your salary to depend upon the profits too. If you like a fixed sum, name it."

"I think that I would prefer a commission, Mr. Engleton."

"All right. That's settled. I wish I could make every man Jack of them work on commission, and keep them all at concert pitch. I've been trying to knock off a new scheme about wages, but it don't come exactly right at present, and is devilish intricate—excuse me, Mrs. Raxford—carried away by the warmth of my subject, and naturally excitable."

Mrs. Raxford accepted his apology very graciously, for he was their new benefactor, and her son's master. He had always liked her son, too—and, who knows, there might be another partnership in store for her Laurence.

"My friends tell me that I shall never stick to

the mine," he said—"that I never stick to anything. Ha! ha! that's a good joke, when I'm always hard at work, too. And, hang it! if I don't stick to the mine, it's all up with me, for all my money's there—except what I have got in the smelting-house. Why, I hold firm to my ideas like a barnacle to a ship's bottom—I never change. Where I seize an idea, take a fancy, or see the being whom I would like to call a friend—the idea is carried out, the fancy is realized, the being is my friend for life! Now, I always admired your straightforwardness, Mr. Raxford, and you're my friend, I hope, as well as my right-hand man. And I always liked the Fyvies, Jonathan excepted, and shall like them to the end. By the way, Miss Fyvie's looking very ill," he said.

"Do you think so?" said Laurence.

"I hope that she does not feel the reverses very much—a sensible girl like her ought not to chafe a great deal at them. Money, after all, isn't everything, and if my father had not died a rich man, and my uncle had not left me all his property, I don't think that I should have cared a great deal. I should have only cut the tails short of my hobbies," he said laughing again, "that's all—do you think

that Miss Fyvie has anything else to fret about?"

"Nothing at all."

"I suppose you and she will marry shortly."

Laurence winced.

"That is not very likely," he answered; "our engagement was ended some time since."

"Dear me!" said the astonished Engleton, "you don't mean that? Why, the Llewellyns never told me—and I met them only a fortnight ago at Torquay."

"Mrs. Llewellyn must have been aware of it, too," said Laurence drily; for Laurence had his suspicions as to the lady who had stood between him and Hester, playing the part of spy with considerable success.

"Nice people the Llewellyns," said Engleton, who saw few faults in the human nature with which he came in contact; "I expect that they'll be down here in the course of a few days."

Laurence stared at this unwelcome piece of news.

"A flying visit—in fact, I'm going to give a kind of house-warming to the estate which I purchased of Mr. Fyvie—my sister, who is my good

housekeeper there, and I together. Mind, I insist upon the company of Mrs. Raxford and son."

Laurence hastened at once to offer his excuses. He was going to apply himself earnestly to work; he had been ill at ease lately—oppressed in his mind, as it were—and he would prefer for a while pursuing without interruption his own quiet way.

"Then I'll make a dinner-party of it. You must eat, you know, somewhere, and you and your mother may as well have dinner with me as with yourselves."

"I am sure that we shall be very happy to join you on the occasion you mention," Mrs. Raxford hastened to say, greatly to the discomfiture of her son.

"Thank you—thank you," he said twice. "I want as many of my own friends round me as I can—the old friends that always made my stay at Tavvydale House a pleasant one. I think of starting now. To-morrow, I hope to see you at the mines, Raxford."

"I am ready to begin, sir."

"That's well; that looks like energy, and an eye to the commission. Good morning."

At the door he stopped.

"Are you fond of mystery, Mr. Raxford?" he asked.

"God forbid!" said Laurence hastily. "I have had enough of mystery these last few months for all my life."

"Very good. Then I suppose there's no secret connected with the reasons for the termination of the engagement between Miss Fyvie and you? You will excuse my curiosity, but I was a little interested in that match for a bystander; and upon my word, I cannot make out why it has been broken off. Why, you were so admirably suited for each other!"

Laurence felt that Mr. Engleton was a trifle too curious—presumed, perhaps, a little on his superiority of position. Still there was no secret connected with the story now; he was intensely grateful that he had not a secret in the world.

"Miss Fyvie and I were engaged in too great a hurry," said Laurence; "before we understood each other's character—each other's feelings. I am to blame for all; and Miss Fyvie, in cancelling that engagement, has acted well and sensibly."

"Exactly," said Engleton; "she would always do that—a sensible young woman, lively without

being frivolous. In the old days, when we three were guests at Tavvydale House, I used to think to myself what a model couple you were. I suppose it is possible——”

“It is not possible,” cried Laurence quickly, and almost angrily forestalling the supposition.

Mr. Engleton quite startled.

“Ah! you were a little too hasty, perhaps, for her. I remember how you used to cut me short in my explanations, and only half look through my papers. That will not do at the mine, Raxford.”

Certainly a pleasant habit of darting away from a delicate question, and setting himself and everybody else at ease—certainly not the worst taskmaster whom Laurence might have found in authority over him.

Laurence turned upon his mother directly the employer had vanished.

“Whatever made you accept that man’s invitation to dinner?” he exclaimed. “How is it possible to back out of it?”

“My dear, we must not back out of it! I haven’t come down to Devon to be buried alive; and though reverses have occurred, I think,” hold-

ing up her head quite proudly, "that we are well-born enough to take our place anywhere."

"We should know our place now."

"I hope we do, Laurence."

"And I am totally unfitted for society. I wish to be at rest for awhile, till I am better—stronger!"

"No one ever got stronger by moping, Laurence," she said; "and I want to see you your bright, cheerful self again."

"In good time, I will begin to drift back to that character."

"And as you can't begin too early, we'll dine with Mr. Engleton at Tavvydale House."

"We'll talk of it again when the invitation comes."

But the invitation came when Laurence was at Wheal Desperation, and Mrs. Raxford answered it at once in the affirmative.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. LLEWELLYN MEETS WITH RETRIBUTIVE
JUSTICE.

LAURENCE had begun work at Wheal Desperation then, and all things were progressing fairly there, when the invitation to dine at Tavvydale House was accepted by his mother.

He was not pleased to hear of its acceptance, but he did not utter one more protest against a visit to the old quarters. His mother seemed disposed for a little life and bustle—and surely, for one night, he might form her escort, and face people whom he disliked, or whom he did not know, passing away from them in a few hours, and letting them, with all their vanities and inanities, pass away from his remembrance also.

He was certainly in no mood for dinner-parties, or parties of any description ; he had become grave and thoughtful—more reserved, in fact—and he

would have forfeited a fair sum to be allowed to stop away ; but he said no more in opposition to his mother's wish. That mother, it may be added here, was an amiable schemer, too, artfully feigning an interest in evening parties, in order to draw her son out of his one morbid groove, to cast him into society that would distract him a little from what she called his "maunderings after business." For she was distressed about him, though she disguised her trouble well, and deceived him ; this new grave-faced young man was not her Laurence, and "that Milly"—however good a girl she might be—had certainly bewitched him. It would all come right in time, she believed ; the village girl would fade away, or marry, or something, and Laurence would marry Hester Fyvie—*she* would take care that Laurence and Hester should meet more often than either bargained for ; and although Hester was not a good match for Laurence now—"not good enough for him," thought this doting mother—still, she loved Hester next to her own son ; she had always regarded her as her daughter-in-law, and she felt very keenly, and as a proud woman might feel, that it was a question of honour that a Raxford should not swerve from his

word. True, Hester and Laurence had cancelled the engagement between them, but they had made it up, and were like brother and sister almost, and she was not in her right senses, if Hester did not still love her Laurence very dearly. When they were out of hearing, she and Mr. Fyvie had many long talks together, keeping their consultations and their results under lock and key. These two old fogies would conspire when they got together, for the future felicity—or that which they believed would be the felicity—of their children.

“If I could only be sure that your boy would marry my girl, after all,” said Mr. Fyvie, in one of these secret conclaves, “I could really be content, for I should be sure of her future, and of a worthy husband for her. Laurence dines with Mr. Engleton, then?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll take Hester and her mother. It’s rather up-hill work to go back to the old place,” he said, “though I don’t pretend to care a button for the change. I fancy that we’re all three thundering hypocrites sometimes.”

“Each supporting the other—just as it should be.”

“Ah! yes, and I’m as strong as a lion, and nobody sees through me, at all events. I’d rather Engleton have had that place than any man of my acquaintance—though Engleton will knock it all to pieces, with his new ideas, and fool’s-head alterations. I daresay I shan’t know the house.”

He groaned as he said this, and he groaned again at the verification of his prophecy, when he found fifty men coming from work at a new wing that Engleton had considered would be an improvement to the establishment.

“I never liked the fellow,” grumbled Mr. Fyvie, “a harum-scarum man, with no gravitation in him.”

“What do you think of this idea?” Engleton asked of him.

It will make the house large enough for you, at any rate,” was the sour reply; “I daresay you felt yourself cramped a bit about here.”

“I thought it would add to the effect,” said Engleton, “I always thought that the house wanted width and solidity; you remember a little suggestion of mine, that you pooh-poohed—well, this is it!”

“Oh! you carry out some of your suggestions, then?”

"A few of them. And I would beautify this place in every way in my power, out of respect for the good friends that first made me welcome here, and gave an old bachelor an idea of what a happy home was like."

"Well and gracefully put, Engleton," said Fyvie, seizing his hand, "and I'm a crabbed old wretch, envious of those who are better off than myself. You must make allowances for a man as broken down as I am."

"This Engleton's a good fellow, Laurence—I took to him from the first," said Mr. Fyvie, later in the evening. He had reversed again his opinion of the man who had supplanted him—he was not so firm and persistent as in the days when he sank his last shilling at Wheal Desperation.

Mr. Engleton's dinner-party was a success—most dinner parties are, so far as the dinner is concerned, when there are plenty of waiters to hand round plenty of good viands, and to see that the glasses always sparkle to the brim. This was a success, whilst dinner lasted, with the guests, too—for they had been well paired off by a shrewd little lady, who possessed a knowledge of character, and was as good tempered, and witty an old maid of five and

forty, as Charles Engleton deserved to be blessed with. The people who could talk about books were together ; the people who were fond of gay life found themselves side by side ; the Tavvydale rector and curate were with district lady visitors, who thought clergymen should always be "shoppy," and always talk as if they had their surplices on, and were thumping velvet cushions ; Mrs. Llewellyn was with an old gossip and scandal-monger, secured expressly for the occasion ; Mrs. Raxford was with Mr. Fyvie ; Laurence was by the side of Miss Llewellyn, and Hester Fyvie was on the left of the host, who certainly might have paid more attention with advantage, to the married lady whom he had escorted into the dining-room.

Laurence had shaken hands with Mrs. Llewellyn upon first encountering her ; he had endeavoured to avoid that infliction, for his instinct assured him who had worked long and laboriously against his peace ; but Mrs. Llewellyn had been demonstrative, and he was not inclined to make a scene upon mere suspicion. She had separated him from Hester after all, and remembering the bright face that had succeeded his first love's—that was ever

before him, for his heart to yearn for—he could forgive her the deed more readily than the unworthiness of the motive that had prompted it.

He found that he was in the thick of the Llewellyn family at dinner—a fact which certainly did not speak well for Miss Engleton's judgment in selection, at any rate, for Laurence would have preferred being in the thick of a street fight. Miss Llewellyn, mild and placable, and stupid, was on one side; Mrs. Llewellyn, fierce and implacable, and bony, was on the other; facing him was the bumptious Treasury clerk, bristling with more importance than ever.

"Do you intend to remain in Devonshire for any time?" Laurence inquired of Miss Llewellyn.

"I don't know—Miss Engleton has been kind enough to ask us to remain as long as we please here. It will be like the old times over again, Mr. Raxford," she said, with a sigh.

"Were they happy times—with you?"

"Yes—I think so—I'm sure they were," she said, blushing; "and though the house don't belong to our family now—still I—I think that I shall like to stay here."

"Jane, don't you hear that Mr. Engleton wishes

to take wine with you," said the mother sharply ;
"how stupid you are, my dear, to be sure !"

"I—I didn't hear him," said Miss Llewellyn ;
"I was talking to Mr. Raxford."

Mrs. Llewellyn turned upon Mr. Raxford with a sweet smile, that curdled every drop of blood in his body.

"I'm afraid that you're a sad flirt, sir," she said, and the jingling ornaments in her hair—she had a chronic passion for jingles, evidently—danced as she shook her head at him ; "I have heard many strange tales about you lately."

"It is as bad a habit to put faith in all you hear," said Laurence, meeting her hard smile with a cold, steady stare, "as it is to put faith in every one you meet."

"Certainly it is," assented Mrs. Llewellyn ;
"that is the reason why I turn a deaf ear to all insinuations—however much they may look like truth—until I have faced the man or woman at whom the shafts are aimed. You follow me ?"

Laurence nodded his head.

"I hear that you have broken off your engagement with my niece, Hester, Mr. Raxford," she said, in a lower tone ; "but I don't believe it."

"Why not?" asked Laurence, curtly.

"Because it would not be like you," she replied; "because I am sure that you are too honourable and steadfast a man, Mr. Raxford, to give up Hester on account of the misfortunes that have happened to her family. She is the same girl to whom you offered your hand, and I feel sure that it was not for her money—her father's money—that you sought her."

"I am thankful, Mrs. Llewellyn, that you do me that justice in your thoughts—it was not for her money, or her chance of money."

"Then if you are still engaged, why do you let so dangerous a rival as Mr. Engleton monopolize all her attention," she said, with that demonstrative tetchiness which always betrayed the scheme she had in view; "why didn't you take her down to dinner?"

Laurence saw clearly through this shallow, but obtrusive woman of the world. He remembered all at once her anxiety to throw Mr. Engleton into the society of her daughter, her manoeuvring for that end—her jealousy of the many young women who had set their caps at the rich bachelor. He had been at a loss for a reason for Mrs. Lle-

wellyn's wish that he should marry Hester now—until he read the fear that Mr. Engleton would fall in love with Hester himself, now Hester was free to accept a second offer. A partnership with Fyvie and Fyvie for her son, and Laurence ousted from his place for his fickleness, was no longer on the cards—the firm was a ruin, and Laurence had been fickle to some purpose.

“I am not engaged to Miss Fyvie now,” said Laurence.

“Not engaged!” she cried, “is it possible?”

“I am so far free from any wish to make Miss Fyvie my wife—and yet so deeply interested in her well-being—that it would afford me an intense pleasure to see so worthy a man as our host marry so excellent a girl as Hester is. I wish that any power of mine could bring that to pass, Mrs. Llewellyn.”

“Well—I am astonished! All is true, then, that I have heard,” she said, looking rudely—even fiercely—at him; “you did fall in love with the mining wench, and Hester found you out, and resented your low tastes by dismissal.”

It was a harsh speech, but he had not expected

mercy from Mrs. Llewellyn. It made his face flush to the roots of his hair, and his blood tingle unpleasantly to his finger-ends, and the tips of his ears. But he stood his ground still.

"Yes, it is true that I fell in love with the mining wench—and I shall never get over that fall, madam."

"I would not glory in my treachery to Hester, Mr. Raxford. It is in bad taste—spoken to the face of her aunt, too."

"It was the treachery of a little-minded being, whose soul was narrow enough to stoop to the commission of a theft, that separated me from your niece, Mrs. Llewellyn—not my treachery, I beg you to consider."

Then it was Mrs. Llewellyn's turn to blush till the colour of her hair was pale by contrast. This was a deadly thrust of the rapier on Laurence Raxford's part, and he believed that his adversary deserved it—though she was a woman, and it was etiquette to spare her. We are of opinion that she deserved it, too.

"It is all very fine to invent excuses," said Mrs. Llewellyn after a pause. "I don't know what was stolen, and I don't want to know. All that I am

aware of is, that you were not justified in breaking that engagement."

She did not seek to prolong the conversation ; she turned her attention to her neighbour, for she was afraid of Laurence, and of what next he might say, now he had lost all respect for her sex. She was glad when he was talking to her daughter, and those clear, fearless eyes were not probing to her very soul, reading her guilt as it had never been read yet. She hated this Laurence Raxford, but she did not wish to make an enemy of him now ; she had a faint hope that he might be led to marry her niece, and leave her daughter free for Mr. Engleton. She knew that Hester had loved Laurence very deeply—that she loved him still, in all probability—and her faith in true affections did not lead her to believe that Laurence cared a great deal for the " mining wench." That was a fancy such as men have very often, and which so very, very seldom comes to marriage—the fancy that fills the streets, nothing more than that !

She was vexed at her own craft now, for she was aware that she had over-reached herself. She had sinned grievously, and in an unwomanly fashion, to separate Hester from the upstart partner, and

now Hester was free to become her daughter's rival! She was sure that Mr. Engleton had paid Jane a certain amount of attention, and that Jane had encouraged it and exulted in it, in her quiet way; and now, when she had come to Devon to finish matters, and hook this goodly fish, lo! he was talking earnestly to Hester Fyvie, and looking at Hester as he had never in all his life looked at Miss Llewellyn. If she had let things take their course, and had never interfered, how much better it would have been! She would have got her fool of a daughter off her hands, and made her a rich woman—now the foothold that she had gained was slipping away from her.

She was a bold woman with a masculine weakness or two. For as she bent over the grapes that some one had put before her, an oath at her short-sightedness was muttered inaudibly—an oath that would have even astonished her husband, who knew rather more than anybody else Mrs. Llewellyn's little peculiarities.

Mr. Engleton was certainly attentive to Hester that evening; it was remarked in more than one quarter before the ladies had risen to withdraw,

that those attentions were certainly "marked." And when the ladies had retired, and the decanters were circulating more briskly, it was noticed that Mr. Engleton was particularly thoughtful.

Once he moved his chair closer to Mr. Fyvie, as though full of some important communication, and then he began suddenly upon a plan of his concerning hospitals, that was for once a "turn off," and not in any way interesting to the planner. For he had made up his mind to ask Miss Fyvie to be his wife, as he would have asked her some months ago if Laurence had not been too quick for him. Laurence's rapidity of movement had staggered him then, though he had swallowed his disappointment, and disguised it admirably well. And now Laurence was apart from her, and Hester was free, he thought that the great plunge might be made, and that there was no time like the present.

He had his doubts—his very grave doubts—as to how his offer would be received, but he was no student of womankind, and his sister—who knew all about this love affair—had assured him that no

woman would say No to him. Hester Fyvie had always been kind, gracious, and sisterly—she had been more kind, if more sad, than usual that night. He took that as a good omen—not thinking that she might be grateful in her heart towards him for having been a good friend.

Suddenly, and when the wine was low in the decanters, a new idea seized him. He was a man of impulse, and his impulses were more than ordinarily generous.

“Raxford,” he said in an aside, “don’t join the ladies when we rise, but step into the garden—under the old tree on the lawn.”

Laurence looked surprised, but assented by a nod; and when the gentlemen rose a few minutes afterwards, and Engleton led the way towards the drawing-room, our hero passed through the window into the garden—now cold and gloomy with the late autumn, and with the leaves thick about the lawn and gravel paths, despite all the gardener’s care.

In a few minutes Engleton joined him, passed his arm through his, and led him away to the very spot where he had quarrelled with Hester Fyvie.

“Now, Raxford, tell me the plain truth, like an honest fellow,” he said. “Do you love Miss Fyvie—or do you not?”

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER LOVE AFFAIR.

THE question put by Charles Engleton startled Laurence Raxford. He was not prepared for so leading an interrogative after dinner ; he was not quite certain that the dinner, or the wines which accompanied it, had not been too much for the composure of his host.

Still it was a question easily answered, and requiring no evasion ; and the gentleman before him might be actuated by the best of motives.

“No, Mr. Engleton,” he replied, “I do not love Miss Fyvie.”

“Thank you,” he said sitting down on the rustic seat beneath the tree. “I am glad to hear it, for I have come to the conclusion that I do.”

He sat down, crossed his arms, and stirred the fallen leaves around him with his feet. He was sober and serious enough, as befitted a man thinking of

a wife. Laurence sat down beside him, saying,

“I am glad to hear that, too, Mr. Engleton, for it is good news.”

“That depends how the matter is likely to end,” said Engleton; “for Miss Fyvie is a girl of determination, and if she has made up her mind not to marry, or to have you after all, why, it’s all over with the couple of us. I thought that I would put the question to you, Raxford, for this reason—that there might be a hankering after her in your heart—a consciousness that you had not acted up to the letter of your engagement—a wish even to renew the old ties. Then I would not have stood in the way; not so much out of charity to you,” he added—“for no man studies another when a woman is in the case, perhaps—but out of consideration for the feelings of Hester, who, womanlike, would have known, by instinct, all that was in your thoughts. But you tell me frankly that Hester is nothing to you?”

“Nothing.”

“Then I shall briefly lay my plans before her,” he said. “Ahem—not my plans exactly, but my suit, and you, as a friend, will wish me success?”

"With all my heart," said Laurence, shaking hands with him.

"I—I should like to know what you two quarrelled about," said Engleton, after a moment's consideration; "for she possesses a good temper, and yours, I take it, is pretty equable. Why you could not agree, is quite a mystery."

"And I hate mystery," said Laurence. "Well, there was a mistake about a letter first, and that separated us. In the meantime, I fell in love with another woman."

"Impossible!" said the enthusiastic Engleton.

"A woman who was unlike anyone whom I had ever seen—who was clever, original, and beautiful, who——oh! but you'll not care to hear me go on like this."

"And when shall you be married?"

"Never," said Laurence, gloomily; "it's all ended between us."

"What! a row in that quarter, too! Why, Raxford, you *must* have a frightful temper, after all! How I have been deceived in you!"

"I am an unlucky man—that's all," said Laurence. "Had we not better go in? Sitting out

here bare-headed, and in dress-coats, is not a wise step."

"Or complimentary to the rest of the company. Raxford, I shall propose to-night, if there's a chance."

"I would not be too hasty," suggested Laurence.

"I never sleep on my projects; and that's a good joke of yours about being too hasty. Ha! ha! a capital joke!"

"I don't see where the point of the jest lies."

"Why, when I was watching my opportunity to propose to Miss Fyvie the last time we were together, old Fyvie came down one morning and told me confidentially that you had made Hester an offer of your hand; and you had only been in the place three or four weeks."

"I *was* too hasty," Laurence confessed; "though I did not warn you for that reason—or think of that mistake of mine. I wished you to consider whether time and place were suitable—whether a better opportunity might not present itself at Tavistock."

"I hope that I shall not frighten Miss Fyvie

very much," he said. Then the two walked into the house.

Laurence wondered a few minutes afterwards at his own anxiety to see Hester Fyvie engaged to Charles Engleton—was it for hersake, or for his own? He leaned against the corner of the piano in the drawing-room, and watched her from the distance, with Mr. Engleton hovering about her, and manœuvring for the first vacant chair on either side of her, and he wished very heartily that this might be a match. It would raise Hester back to the old position, which she had adorned, and set her in her proper sphere—it would give Engleton a good wife, as surely as it gave her a good husband.

This for her sake!—what would it do for his own? Well, it would take a load from his conscience, for he felt that he had darkened her life by his seeming duplicity—that he had taught her to love him, and then passed away from her to make love, with all his heart, to Milly Athorpe. He could not shake from his mind the impression that their engagement was scarcely at an end; he felt as if his promise to her had never been broken, for she had told Milly that *he* should give her up, and that unless he did so, she would hold firm to

her engagement. In their explanation together Hester had told him that he was free, but it was a hurried explanation, born of an excitable meeting, and he could scarcely remember all that had passed on that night. They had met very often; they had spoken coldly and dispassionately; they were good friends, who understood each other's thoughts, perhaps; they could never in all their lives be more than brother and sister; but he should be glad to hear that Hester had accepted the offer of Mr. Engleton. That would free him from his ideas concerning the old compact—ideas which would have troubled him at times, even if he had married Milly Athorpe, or if Milly had not spoken of his duty to the woman whom he had innocently deceived.

He had combated Milly's reasoning successfully; he had laughed at his mother's; he had almost scoffed at Mrs. Llewellyn's on that very evening; but he could not completely master his own. There was a drag upon his freedom, for he felt that there was a wrong or a sorrow that Hester Fyvie nursed, and he feared that it concerned himself. There was a staidness and quietness about her which was new—more, there was a firmness which showed itself frequently in

her lower condition of life, now she had taken the reins of management at the little villa where the Fyves lived. He should feel more happy in his mind if Hester accepted Mr. Engleton; he should feel wholly free, which he scarcely did now, though he was waiting for Milly—though it made his heart more light to think that he was waiting for her patiently and trustfully.

Mr. Engleton proposed that very evening. He had made up his mind, and he was prompt and business-like about it. He found the vacant seat, making quite a race for it between himself and Mrs. Llewellyn, who would have kept him out of it, if possible, and Hester, innocent of her host's intentions, smiled a welcome to him. When he had sat by her side ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, she had her doubts, for the first time, of Mr. Engleton's thoughts, and wished that she was away by her mother's side, instead of in that suspicious recess by the window, where nobody could hear them, and where they might be taken for lovers by those who were curious enough to look after them. Mrs. Llewellyn was curious, and on the watch—Miss Llewellyn, also, perhaps, though she was turning over a photographic album

with Miss Engleton ; the rest were talking, laughing, sipping coffee, or thinking it was time that their carriages were called round to the front door.

Mr. Engleton watched his opportunity, and dashed suddenly into the subject.

"I hope your visit here, Miss Fyvie, has not given rise to many painful associations."

"A few—not many," said Hester, with a sigh.

"I want you to get used to coming here," he said, in tones that put Hester completely on her guard at once, "just as if it was the old home, where no changes had occurred."

"It would be hard to believe in that," said Hester ; "but I hope that I *shall* get used to visits here—though the first step has cost me an effort."

"If I could only hope that you would consider it as your future home, Miss Fyvie," said Engleton, rapidly getting up the steam for the occasion, "your home for good. If you would only give me a hope to claim you for its mistress presently, I should be the happiest fellow in all the world. For I really love you very much—and I want you to try to love me, just a little, some day!"

It was an eccentric confession, that might have

elicited a smile from one less interested than Hester. It elicited another oath from Mrs. Llewellyn, who knew what was going on now, though she could not hear a word; she ground her teeth, and swore like a trooper. Hester, on the contrary, felt inclined to burst into tears; she was distressed in mind at this avowal, and though she had had an idea once or twice in life that Mr. Engleton was inclined to be fond of her, yet the confession had come upon her with a genuine surprise; for the time and place for the confession had not been chosen well, or even with consummate delicacy.

Still it was a well-meant offer, and Engleton was in earnest.

"I don't want to hurry you with an answer," he said. "I feel that I have been too quick, perhaps, with my offer; but I thought that it was best over, and that you might like a little time for consideration. Please don't answer me to-night—I'd so much rather that you wouldn't. I won't have an answer now."

For he had already read his answer in the deepening gloom of her face, and he felt sure that second thoughts were the better for him.

"You are very kind to make me this offer, Mr.

Engleton," said Hester, astonished at her own firmness, now that she had found her voice at last, "and I thank you for the great compliment that you have paid me—me who can bring you no beauty, no money, no love, sir."

"Love will come in time," cried Engleton. "Why, it must, Miss Hester!"

Hester shook her head.

"I am sure that you will not pain me by any further discussion on the subject—that you will accept my answer now as final—that you will let me think of you as a friend again."

She spoke as if, for the last few minutes, he had been her enemy, and he ran his hands through his wiry hair, and looked utterly crestfallen.

"There isn't a chance, then, for me?" he said, dismally.

"No," Hester answered. "And it is the best for you, too, that there should not be. I could only marry you for your money," she added, with asperity.

"I wish that you would marry me for something—I don't care for what!" he replied; "for there never was a girl I cared for except yourself."

"Not Miss Llewellyn?"

"Oh! bother her!" cried he; "I liked her because she was a relation of yours, and something like you about the nose; but I couldn't marry her because she had your nose, you know!"

This was turning from sentiment to burlesque at a jump, although Engleton did not see the humour in his speech, and thought Hester was somewhat unfeeling to smile at him. He went back to sentiment again, however, and turned Hester grave enough with his next words.

"I loved you long before I knew it myself, or you knew Mr. Raxford. I wondered why I was constantly inventing excuses to come down to Devon—and I bought this house because it had been yours, and I thought that I should not like strangers to live in it. If it hadn't been for Mr. Raxford coming here—that was your father's fault!—I think that I might have persuaded you to have me?"

"You are a very lucky man to escape me," she said bitterly; "for I am vain, exacting, irritable, jealous, and unjust. You know how soon this Mr. Raxford found out my failings and tired of me."

"Pardon me—but he says——"

‘Ah! no matter what he says,” she interrupted; “he would do his best to clear me with honour, I dare say. And yet, after all, he was true and honourable until he thought me false. You will go away now, Mr. Engleton—I am distressed and excited, and don’t know what I am saying. Surely,” she said impetuously, “you will spare me?”

“I—I am very sorry that I have given you pain by my addresses,” he said, springing to his feet; “you will forgive me, I am sure. I—I only wanted to make you a happy woman.”

“Yes—yes, I know that, but you will meet with a better wife than I could have made you—you are deserving of a better one.”

“I don’t want a better.”

And with this flat assertion of his wishes, and denial of her assurances, he walked out of the room, and was not seen for half an hour afterwards. When he returned, the guests had thinned, and his sister was apologizing for his withdrawal, and telling everybody that he was subject to these sudden “rushings.”

“No, I’m not,” he said flatly, “but I was a little upset to-night, gentlemen—too much drink, shall we say? That’s the best excuse.”

"Charles!" exclaimed his sister, "how can you?"

"Has Mr. Raxford gone?"

"Yes, he and his mother went away five minutes since."

"And the Fyvies—oh! here they are! Miss Fyvie, will you allow me to escort you to your carriage? Thank you."

"To our hired fly, he means," said Mr. Fyvie jocularly; "and capital flies you get at the Lion, if it wasn't for the screws they put between the shafts. We've one to-night, Engleton, that I'll swear I sold fifteen years ago as incapable—a grey jibber, with one eye out."

Engleton escorted Miss Fyvie to the fly, Mr. and Mrs. Fyvie bringing up the rear. He did not address a word to Hester until her father and mother were in the carriage with her, when he leaned forwards, shook hands, and said,

"Tell them all that I have said, and all that I have been disappointed in, Miss Fyvie, and then—and then forget all about it, if you please!"

Hester did not answer, and she remained very quiet in the corner of the carriage for a while. Mr. Fyvie, having recovered his astonishment, spoke to his wife, congratulated her on the way in which she had gone

through the fatigues of the evening—thought that a lower estate agreed with her, take it altogether—remarked on Mrs. Llewellyn's vigour, and her lord and husband's abruptness, and fancied that both of them might have preached less at him about imprudence, and so forth—finally, came to a full stop, leaned across, and looked into his daughter's face.

"I am not asleep," said Hester, mistaking his movement, probably mistaking it intentionally.

"My dear, I never thought you were."

Another pause, then he said—

"May a curious old man ask what Mr. Engleton meant to-night?"

"Nonsense—that's all."

"Has he asked you to become Mrs. E.—and have you snubbed him in consequence, like a well-conducted young lady as you are."

Mr. Fyvie was a sharp man yet, and jumped at conclusions with considerable perspicuity. Hester had made up her mind to postpone her revelation till the morning, but her father had been too quick for her.

"Mr. Engleton asked me to become his wife—and I refused him, papa," she said; "for oh! I

had no love for him, and I did not want to share his high position without it. He was very kind and very earnest, but—he has made me very miserable.”

She would have spread her hands before her face, but her father suddenly took them in his own.

“We can’t have any crying about this, Hester; there’s nothing to cry about, unless you’re sorry that you didn’t say ‘yes.’”

“Sorry!” said Hester scornfully, “if he had been king of England, I would not have married him.”

“Right enough. Nobody wants you to marry him—some of us might be sorry to have you married at all. What do you say, old lady?” to his wife at his side.

“It was a good offer,” she replied; “and Mr. Engleton’s of very good family, and quite a gentleman in himself.”

“Pooh!—a fellow that’s always talking about drain-pipes and sewage,” said the sire, lightly; “a nice fellow in his way, barring his nasty talk, but not good enough for our girl.”

“Too good for me—a fretful and dissatisfied woman!”

This was the second time that night that Hester had called herself names ; and she did it with a vengeance, as though she thought that she deserved every epithet thus self-bestowed.

"Ah! we'll find a first-rate husband for you some day, Hester."

Hester did not smile at her father's jest.

"I hope—I hope that you'll never talk to me about marrying," she cried passionately. "I will never marry!"

"Hester, my dear," said the mother languidly, "you're not thinking anything about Mr. Raxford now? That's not showing a proper respect for yourself."

"He is free—he may marry whom he pleases. I set him free myself," said Hester wildly; "but I love him! There, I am not ashamed to own it. I am true to my first promise to love him always, and I shall never—never think of anybody else."

"Whew!" said Mr. Fyvie; "it's out at last! I knew it."

That is what Laurence had known too, and which rested on his hopes distinct from hers, like a

weight that there was no upraising. This was the shadow that had fallen on him that night in the drawing-room of Tavvydale House. This was the burden which Hester had to bear, and which she had borne well, until the current had grown too strong for the flood-gates. Then suddenly she had ceased to resist—for they had spoken of marriage, and giving in marriage, and this was a young woman who had lost her lover by her own self-will.

But he had never given her up; and in her heart she held fast to her engagement. She had set him free; but he had never by a word, even at so late an hour as this, when he confessed to a love for another, accepted his freedom, or told her that she was *not* engaged to him. It was an odd reasoning, and it only rendered her more miserable to brood on this, though face to face with Laurence she was an admirable actress.

“Courage, Hester,” said her father; “the storm is over, and it is late in the day to fret concerning it. Presently another and a brighter day for all who are young and pure as you are. Leave the old to complain.”

“No, I will keep with the old ; and they shall not complain whilst I am with them,” was Hester’s ready answer.

CHAPTER IV.

MILLY'S NEW HOME.

MEANWHILE, it behoves us to see how Milly Athorpe was bearing the absence of her lover. Here was a woman in the same position as Hester Fyvie, loving the same man, and set as far apart from him. A woman who had the advantage in Laurence loving her in return—if that be an advantage, rather than an aggravation of despair, when the certainty of separation is arrived at.

The younger, and the stronger, as she was the more lowly woman—bore up better, for she had other cares to fight against, and that kept her from brooding too much upon the inevitable. She set that one particular care as much aside as possible—for that belonged to the past now. In her own room sometimes, when Inez was asleep, and did not require her attendance, she could sit down and face it, even shed tears over her loss, as a girl has a

right to shed tears over the loss of a sweetheart true and affectionate, and yet sundered from her by circumstances—torture herself by drawing the vivid picture of what might have been, had she thought more of herself, and less of the duties that had devolved upon her.

But in the every-day world she was content—even cheerful. She possessed a strong will and it bent her into the new channel, and trained her thoughts aright; she was a religious girl, who could find consolation for all worldly troubles in God's book, and when the troubles were at their thickest, she was calm and brave and strong withal.

Milly had come down to Tavvydale with Inez. For the convenience of having Inez near her, she had taken a little house in the mining village itself, and given up Wind-Whistle Cleft for good. She had found a tenant for her little cottage there—and it was pleasant, when Inez was strong enough to be left, to go in search of her rent through all the old spots that were home-marks which she loved. We believe that the rent was only eighteen-pence a week, and *that* she had thought at one time of offering to Mr. Fyvie, now

that he was in reduced circumstances, but her common sense had deterred her from wounding the old man's pride by the offer.

She had come down to Tavvydale with her uncle's wife then, and the story had been quietly told of how Inez had not been to blame, and how Captain Athorpe had been unduly jealous of her, and what a sad result had followed the mistake. Tavvydale listened to the recital, and believed what it liked about it, and thought, take it all together, no better of Mrs. Athorpe. Tavvydale knew the world, and put this and that together, and was not to be hoodwinked at its time of life. It was a neat story, but Tavvydale had its own version of the facts, and set it side by side with the more authentic narrative. Mrs. Athorpe was only hindered from running away from home by her husband stepping in to stop her—the charitable, who had never liked Captain Athorpe, pitied the result, and were sorry for the wife's affliction ; but they were nearly all of one opinion, that Mrs. Athorpe would have eloped with Jonathan Fyvie, if she had not been prevented.

“He will believe this, too—he will never take your word and mine, should he ever come back, Milly,” sighed Inez.

"He will believe us—when he returns," said Milly assuringly.

"But you don't think that he ever will come back—in your heart, Milly, you don't," said Inez anxiously.

"Every night I pray for his return."

"Ah! for your own sake as well as mine—that you may be quit of all my fretfulness, and wickedness," said the captious woman; and then Milly had to assure her that it was not for that she prayed.

Thus it may be seen that Milly had no light task in this quarter—Inez being very weak, and in her weakness very irritable and jealous. Affliction, if it had improved the character of Mrs. Athorpe, had not transformed her into a heroine—it was not in her nature to develop any heroic traits, or to be meek and angelic with her moral change.

She was an invalid—she might remain an invalid all her life. She had been snatched as from the very jaws of death; for Athorpe had left her for dead, and Churdock had not thought her living when he had carried her up the steep sides of the Cleft to his mother's house.

All her strength had departed, and she dragged her limbs about the rooms, holding chairs and

tables in her progress, the wreck of the woman that she had become, the ghost of the handsome wife whom Captain Athorpe had taken to himself, and trusted in.

She was fully alive to the dangers to which her vanity had led her; she did not spare herself one reproach, on the contrary, she magnified her sin, and despaired of mercy in this world, and the next. Though she *was* returning to her husband's home, full of resolution to make that home a happy one from that night, though she had defeated Jonathan Fyvie her tempter, and bade him depart from her for ever, and leave her guiltless in her husband's eyes, it was only Milly who could console her by those assurances, not herself. By herself she was a woman wholly wretched—and she quenched the sunlight from the home she dwelt in by the force of her morbidity. Add to this that she deplored the loss of her beauty, though she took it as a judgment against her for her vanity; that she was ever on the watch for signs of Milly tiring of her, and fretted at signs that had never had existence; that she was beset by a craving to see her husband, and tell him that he had judged her wrongly at the last—that she was cross

with Milly, and then sorry that Milly had been pained by her capriciousness, and the reader will not envy our heroine her charge.

Milly had not gone back to her school at once. She was behind time ; she had taken an extraordinary lease of holidays, and Mr. Wells was deeply offended, and had suspended her. He had gone very much out of his way to secure Milly the appointment, and then Milly had absented herself within a week or two after entering upon her duties. He had half-engaged a substitute, when Milly had returned to the village, and every child in Tavvydale had gone half mad with the news. Then he thought it over again—called on Milly, heard the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and softened at once, like a good-hearted, sensible old gentleman that he was.

In the autumn, then—in the clear October months that one finds in Devonshire as a rule—everything was in a state of rest, and there was no sensation to stir the little world of Tavvydale. Milly was teaching regularly at her school during the day—teaching Inez regularly in the evening, or trying, perhaps, to teach her patience and submission.

Coming home from school, she would find Inez watching at the door for her—a large-eyed woman, with a sallow face, that had become lined before its time.

“What a time you have been, Milly—how you must have been loitering, and I all alone like this, too!” Inez would say sometimes.

“I have been to the Tavvydale library for a book that I think will suit you.”

“Ah! you are always considerate, and I’m an ingrate, that is not deserving of a thought.”

Sometimes Inez would mourn the absence of James Whiteshell, once again in London for the winter season, teaching a crowd of little ones to a dance; she would have been happy with Mr. Whiteshell, whose reminiscences of the dancing days—the theatrical days—almost took away the sting of present pain—the horror of present isolation. Poor Inez was full of regrets and reproaches, and therefore not pleasant company—as who is with half the strength gone away from him, and with all the hopes of peace or of advancement in the background for ever? It was a marvel, that a girl so young as Milly—a girl unused to face sorrow and suffering in others, having a sorrow of her

own, too, that less thoughtful girls would have made much of, having an aunt looked down upon by Tavvydale respectability, and an uncle wandering in the world friendless and alone—it was a marvel, we repeat, that a girl so young as Milly should have settled down to all this, and shown no traces of the “wear and tear !”

Was she well and strong with all this?—or would she fight on to the end, like a thoroughbred, and then collapse? She was looking well and strong, at all events, and the colour had stolen back to the cheeks of the Devonshire rose.

She was absent on school duties, and Inez had curled herself into an arm-chair, and was dozing away the afternoon—looking not unlike a dead woman in her sleep—when a knock was heard at the outer door.

“Come in,” said Inez.

The knock was repeated, however, and Inez gave vent to a scream of “Come in!” at this. She was weak, and to move to the door was an effort just then;—why could not people touch the latch and enter?

The latch was touched at the second adjuration, and a plump, round-faced, rosy-cheeked old lady,

with silver ringlets hanging in bunches on each side of her head, came into the cottage.

"I hope that I am not disturbing you?" she said.

"I was going to sleep—I am an invalid," said Inez, in reply; "but I am used to being disturbed now. What is it?"

"You—you surely are not Milly?"

"No, I am Mrs. Athorpe," was the answer here; "you have heard of me, I daresay?" she added, with a curling lip.

"I cannot say that I have," said the old lady, in a bewildered manner. "I may have heard, and forgotten, for I have not a good memory. Are you—are you Milly's mother?"

The slight figure in the chair writhed uneasily at this, and two thin hands were beaten impatiently together.

"My God! have I changed so much as this, to be taken for Milly's mother?"

She sat and thought for awhile of this great alteration in her, then she said,

"I am only a few years Milly's senior—her uncle's young wife, just recovering from a violent illness. I don't think that I am six years

older than Milly,—certainly not more than six.”

“Dear me! you must have been very ill indeed,” said the visitor. “I should not have thought it, now.”

“May I ask your name and business, madam?” said Inez.

“My name is Raxford, and I wish to see Miss Athorpe.”

“Is your business particular?”

“Well—not very particular, perhaps,” Mrs. Raxford confessed; “but I was curious to see Miss Athorpe for myself. I have heard a great deal of her.”

“From your son?”

“Partly.”

“Your son, I hope, has not sent you here?”

“He has not sent me—but why do you hope that?”

“Because—it is better that we all keep apart—that he should not come, or send any messages, to unsettle my niece again. He has his duties to fulfil, and she has hers, and I don’t see any occasion myself why they should ever meet.”

“Oh! I am quite of the same opinion,” said

Mrs. Raxford, unable to resist a toss of her head at this; "quite of the same opinion as you are."

"That is good hearing," said Mrs. Athorpe; "will you take a seat? Milly will be home in half an hour, or thereabouts."

Mrs. Raxford took the seat indicated, by the window full of geraniums and fuschias—as flower-burdened as the window of the cottage had been in Wind-Whistle Cleft—and waited patiently for Milly. She had come out of curiosity, partly; she had come to analyze Milly with her woman's shrewdness, and even sift, like a jealous mother, for facts against her, that should assure herself—perhaps Laurence—how wise a step it was to keep away from her. She had other little schemes in her head, too, and the reader will guess all about them before the chapter ends.

Her first appearance at the cottage had been inauspicious; she had met with one member of the Athorpe family, and a very tetchy, odd, foreign-looking, old kind of a young woman she was. Probably Milly would be like her, and she, Mrs. Raxford, would be one more mother to throw up her hands in astonishment, and mourn the perverted tastes of her son. Young men had strange

tastes, and dashed strangely at their fancies—Laurence had been under a spell here!

She sat and thought of this Milly, and of a hundred things akin to her and connected with her—of Hester Fyvie and her Laurence in particular. The weak woman stared at her for awhile, and then went off to sleep again, breathing with difficulty in her sleep, and panting more like a dog than a woman. The motherly heart of Mrs. Raxford softened as she watched her. She rose and bent over her, fancying once that she was choking in her sleep.

“Poor thing!—how ill she looks,” murmured Mrs. Raxford; “how ill she must have been!”

“Ah! you may say that, madam,” said Mrs. Athorpe, suddenly opening her eyes; “for three long weeks I looked death steadily in the face, and prayed God not to take me.”

“Were you afraid to die, then?”

“Yes—bitterly afraid,” said Inez; “for my husband mistrusted me, and I was anxious to see him again and tell him that I was not so bad—not one half so bad as he believed—as the people about here believe to this day. To see him once more—and *then* to die, madam!”

"Oh ! dear," sighed Mrs. Raxford. This was a strange family into which her son Laurence would have married—all manner of things spoken against the Athorpes in the village, evidently, and one woman with whispers circulating against her fame. What a lucky thing for Laurence that he had escaped this doubtful lot ! Still the woman's excitement touched her sympathy—she might be a woman unjustly suspected, as any woman might be in a world so apt to think the worst of everything. She was a woman more sinned against than sinning, or she would have not spoken with that earnestness.

"I am keeping you from sleep," said Mrs. Raxford.

"Oh ! I shall not sleep again—the least thing disturbs me, and I knew that you were standing over me. What made you do that ?"

"You were breathing heavily, and I thought that——"

"That I was going to die," added Inez, quickly ;
"oh ! I always sleep like that. And I am getting stronger every day. I can walk the whole length of the street with Milly's arm to lean upon."

"I am glad to hear that you are recovering."

"Why, you are a stranger—why should you be glad to hear that I am getting well again?—what am I to you, Mrs. Raxford?"

Mrs. Raxford was embarrassed by these sharp replies. She coughed, and stammered, and felt that Mrs. Athorpe was a trifle too much for her. She made an effort to stand her ground, though.

"I think that it is common charity to be glad when a woman recovers from a long illness—just as it is charity that makes us pray at church for all in misery and affliction."

"I wonder how many really think of what they are praying for," said Inez; "it is common prayer—commonplace prayer, like your commonplace condolence. You must excuse me if I speak abruptly," she said, less acrimoniously; "I am an invalid, and have been humoured lately. A little while ago, I was the life of my home—almost the only one who could make poor Captain Athorpe smile. You will excuse me?" she added, gesticulating with both hands, in that foreign manner which Laurence Raxford had not liked.

"Pray do not mention it."

Mrs. Athorpe had had her say, and was inclined to be more courteous. She felt better now that

she was thoroughly awake ; she was not in pain, and Milly would be home directly.

"Will you take a seat again?—my niece will not be long now," she said. Your appearance here will be a great surprise to her. I hope that you will not disturb her—she is disturbed enough by me, poor girl! and would be all the better for more rest."

"Is she your only nurse—and friend?"

"The only friend in the world, save one poor old man, living in London," Inez answered. "Why, without her I should have died long ago, and yet I am not grateful. I worry her—and tease her with my humours, till any one but Milly would wish me in my grave. Madam, she stands as near the angels as she can."

Inez woke up to enthusiasm, and Mrs. Raxford sat down once more, bewildered at the variable moods of this sick woman.

"I don't know what you have come for—you haven't offered me a very fair explanation," said Inez ; "but I trust it is not to unsettle her by any thoughts of your son. She has got over that—and the matter had better rest. I am sure that she would not marry him if you were to go down on

your knees, and beg her to become his wife. If he were dying, and marrying him might save him, she might do that, perhaps—that's all. You perceive how ill I am," she added, with characteristic selfishness, "and how impossible it is for her to leave me!"

"Yes—I see," said Mrs. Raxford absently.

"And she would not—even if I wished her, which I do at times, when I am full of pain and aggravation. They say women are patient in affliction—well, I am not, madam. It was never my nature to be patient."

"I shall not ask Milly to become my son's wife," said Mrs. Raxford, by way of assurance to her companion; "that has not once entered my thoughts."

"The idea has shocked you, perhaps? It is an unequal match?"

"Well, yes—a little so, possibly," stammered Mrs. Raxford, at a loss for an answer.

"Whyso?" demanded Inez imperiously, and with fresh excitement; "what are you Raxfords, I wonder, that you should lord it over Milly Athorpe. Her grandmother was a lady, and her father's father was an honest man. Can you go back even as far as

that with *your* pedigree? Can you show in all your purse-proud circle, madam, a face and figure like our Milly's—a more gentle-hearted, purer, better girl? Why, I was a beauty myself, but I was jealous of her face—and if I had had but the shadow of her virtues, I should not have been a woman stricken down to helplessness like this!”

She burst into tears, and turned of a stony grey. Mrs. Raxford rushed to a water-bottle on the table, filled a glass, and placed it to her lips.

“My dear woman, how excitable you are.”

“Yes—and I have been worse since my illness,” she whispered. “Let me see, what was I saying?”

“Oh! never mind—don’t try to recollect. Please don’t say any more.”

“It doesn’t matter what *I* say, at all events—I’m a poor dependent here. I have not a penny in the world but what I am indebted to Milly for. How many nieces would stand by their aunts in marriage as that faithful girl has stood by me?”

“Who’s talking about Milly?” said a cheerful voice behind them.

“Oh! here you are at last. What a time you have been, to be sure, and I tormented by this wo-

man here," she said. "Well, well, there's nothing in the house that's worth hurrying home for."

"I don't know that, when we have a visitor waiting for us," said Milly, with a graceful bow to Mrs. Raxford.

"You are Milly, then?"

"Yes, Milly Athorpe. Did you wish to see me?"

"I have been curious to see you for a long time. My name is Raxford."

"His mother!" murmured Milly, as she sat down and faced the visitor. "Well, Mrs. Raxford, you are welcome here."

CHAPTER V.

THE DAUGHTER THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

YES, she was very beautiful, thought Mrs. Raxford ; in all her life she had not seen a face like that—a face that told its story well, and thrilled with its earnestness those who gazed too long at it. She was not surprised now that Laurence, with his love for the beautiful in art and nature, should have loved this girl before her. Her only wonderment was, that he should have had strength of will to put up with the loss of her—to become resigned to a separation from her.

She could have taken Milly in her arms, folded her to her heart, and kissed her then and there ; but she resisted the impulse, lest the girl should take fresh hopes from her sympathy, and think that she was the bearer of glad tidings to her.

She was looking at Milly still, when Inez rose

from her chair, and began to toil towards the stairs in one corner of the parlour.

"Are you going, Inez?" said Milly. "Surely," turning to Mrs. Raxford, "there's no necessity for this?"

"Not any," said Mrs. Raxford. "I have scarcely a motive to allege for this intrusion."

"I would rather go upstairs, and lie down for a little while," said Inez. "Mrs. Raxford has not let me sleep much this afternoon, and I must have rest, Milly."

"You will not be able to get downstairs again to-night."

"No matter. That will give you more room till bed-time," she answered.

Milly went upstairs with Inez, conducting her carefully from stair to stair, till she had landed her in the upper room.

"What a trouble—a life-long trouble—I am to you, my child!" the invalid said as they went upstairs together.

"Nonsense! What a companion, Inez, saving me from my Robinson-Crusoe like existence in the Cleft."

"Hush! don't speak of the Cleft, where murder

might have been done, Milly," she whispered. "I have been dreaming of the Cleft this afternoon, only I didn't tell that woman downstairs about it. An awful dream—with everything like reality before me."


"Ah! but this is reality, Inez; and the worst is over."

"I will try to think so."

Milly was in the parlour again. She had removed her bonnet—she had taken to bonnets since her rise in life—and the beauty of her face was more apparent without it.

"Now, Mrs. Raxford, I am at your service."

Mrs. Raxford, however, was at a loss how to begin, or what to begin about. This was not the Milly whom she expected to find, and to whom she could have spoken words of kind, well-meant, advice. She had expected a pretty, round-faced, high-complexioned maiden, with country clumsiness in everything she did and said, and with that unmistakable Devonshire accent, from which we have endeavoured to spare our readers, and which Milly had very faintly possessed at any time, and seemed latterly to have entirely dropped. Here was a girl, very beautiful



and graceful, and grave. She had heard that Milly was a nervous girl, but her timidity was not apparent on this occasion, and the mother was at a disadvantage even in deportment.

"Are you very much surprised to see me here?" she asked.

"I am surprised, of course," answered Milly; "but I always thought that I should see you some day."

"You have been anxious to see me, perhaps."

"I was anxious *once*," said Milly, in a lower tone, "anxious to know whether you were like your son, or if you would think me deserving of him—the girl that under the circumstances he should have chosen. You will pardon me speaking like this—for I do not think that you will misjudge my motive for thus speaking."

"No, I don't think that I shall misjudge you," said Mrs. Raxford.

"If—if things were different, I could not have spoken so calmly, and with so little hesitation. As it is, I can speak of you and your son, and not shrink much—at least, I can speak to you of him!"

"Why to me?"

"Why, are you not his mother?—the mother

who might have called me daughter, and forgiven, for her son's sake, my poor life and calling, if it had been ordered otherwise? He used to tell me that he was sure his mother would not look down upon me, but love me for myself, just as he loved me. Well," with a shy glance towards her, through the tears that had stolen to her eyes, despite her self-command, "I think she would!"

"My dear, if it had been ordered otherwise, as you say, I'm sure she would," burst forth the old lady, "for my Laurence's happiness is mine. I should not know any comfort without I did not share all the joys of his life!"

"Yes, yes, you are the mother that he sketched to me," said Milly, hurriedly; "and the daughter that might have been, and that would have loved you very, very dearly, ventures to kiss you in all reverence."

This was too much for the good lady, as it was for Milly, and both women cried in concert, as though their joys and sorrows were one already.

"Ah! I see now," sobbed forth Mrs. Raxford; "I understand Laurence now better than I have ever done before. I think, Milly, that it was, perhaps, a very wise choice of his."

Milly shook her head.

"You must not think that, madam."

"I wonder what you will think of me when I tell you that I came here to ask you to send some message to Laurence, that should render him more resigned to your loss?"

"Why, that a mother's love brought you to ask me that—not any enmity to me?"

"God forbid that I should bear enmity towards any one who has loved my boy!"

"I can tell you, Mrs. Raxford, almost without a blush, what I might have never found words to tell to him—the depth of my true love for Laurence. It is not like the love that I have ever read in books—I don't know what it is like, madam!"

"You love him still, then?"

"Why, yes, with all my heart—with a love that I shall never be ashamed of, though it sets me apart from him for good."

"I—I can't tell him this."

"Oh! no, to be sure not," said Milly; "I will think of a few words for him, and you shall tell me what you think of them, and if they are applicable. My love for him is a secret between you and me—may I speak of it again?"

"Yes, if you like," said Mrs. Raxford.

"I like—because I want you to understand me. If you and Laurence think the best of me, I shan't mind what any one else says, now. Well," drawing a deep breath, "I loved him first, before he ever thought of me—when he came into the Cleft carrying my uncle's bag. I never thought that he *could* think of me; but I made him my hero in my heart, and shut him up there, treasuring my idol like a romantic school girl. I knew how high he was above me—he was like a demigod to my poor village fancies—and when he came to earth to tell me that he loved me, why, I felt raised to heaven."

She clapped her hands as though applauding her own rhapsody, and the face was aglow with fire, and still more beautiful.

"Are you self-taught?" gasped Mrs. Raxford.

"Partly so. Why do you ask?"

"These are strange words of yours."

"Ah! the fault of the books I used to read in the Cleft—they spoiled me with their poetry," said Milly. "I will be less high-flown, and more precise."

"I did not ask you for the reason you think," murmured the old lady.

"When I fancied that he had tried to deceive me, I was more sorry for him than myself—I was heart-broken, madam. If troubles affecting my family had not come at the same time to distract me in the first moments of my bitterness, I think that I must have died. For there had not come a thought to me of his unworthiness. And when we met again, and I knew that I could never be his wife, I was as glad that he could free himself from every stain against his honour, as though it placed him at the altar with me. And that is my comfort now, madam—that he *was* the hero worthy of my picture."

"I—I wish that you did not think of him so much, Milly," said Mrs. Raxford, laying her hand upon the brown braids of hair caressingly; "I am sure that it would be better for you."

"I never speak of him to my aunt," replied Milly; "only to you have I confessed everything, for you are his mother, and understand me. Because I can never marry him—because I feel it my duty to say that I *will* never marry him—I can't love him the less, though I would, for his sake, make him believe so."

"Your duty lies with your aunt, you consider?"

"Yes—for her husband, my uncle, befriended me when I was left an orphan in the Cleft. My duty may take me in search of that uncle at any moment of my life, for I am on the watch for news of him—and my duty to my old lover is to keep away from him. For these reasons, and for another which casts a slur upon our name—oh! for many reasons, all unutterable—I gave up your son, and begged him to marry the girl to whom he was first engaged."

"You begged him to do that?"

"I thought that he would be happy with her, and make her happy. And it appeared to me at first that it was his duty."

"It is—we think it is," said Mrs. Raxford.

"Is he—is he much altered?"

"He is a graver man, and he has lost that pleasant smile which won upon us all."

"I remember," said Milly.

"And it seems a pity that, as he can't marry you, and as Miss Fyvie has never forgotten him—as they were first engaged, and all that—it seems a pity that he doesn't make up his mind to have her."

"If he does not love her?" asked Milly, with his

indignant tones ringing in her ears again, as they had rung out on the hills.

"He would love her again in time," asserted Mrs. Raxford; "he would make her an affectionate husband and father!"

"Ye—es," said Milly, with a heavy sigh that she could not keep back; "and I think it would be the best for us all. What message shall I send him?"

She rose, and stood deliberating with her finger to her lip. Suddenly she turned upon Mrs. Raxford, and said hurriedly,

"I have it—tell him that you have seen me, and that you have found me very happy. That you spoke of him to me, and that I said very calmly and dispassionately—very dispassionately—that I hoped that he was going to marry Miss Fyvie, shortly, for her sake, and for his word's sake. Will that do?"

"Yes—it will do," said Mrs. Raxford, thoughtfully; "but how—how can you find the heart to send that message, loving him as you do?"

"Because I love him! If I can't have him myself—if I am sure that *that* is utterly impossible, do you think that I would have him mourn for

me all his life, when he might be happy in forgetting me? No, madam, I may wince a little when they tell me that he is married, but I will be glad to hear it for all that, and I will pray with all my heart for a blessing on his future."

"God bless you, Milly. I think I understand you—and your nobleness and unselfishness. You would have been a daughter to me, indeed!" she could not help asserting as she kissed her.

"And I might have known a mother's love again—sharing it with Laurence. But, let it pass away. I have lived many years without it."

"I shall come very often now, and——"

"No, you must not come again," said Milly, firmly; "it has been a great satisfaction—a great pleasure to me—to see you, but you would unsettle me for active life, and you and all belonging to you must not cross my path."

"We two women might be good friends. Why not?"

"You would speak of Laurence to me, and I might get dissatisfied, and repent my firmness. I have told you that I love him—and I am only a woman!"

It was an entreaty not to come again, and Mrs.

Raxford accepted it, and bade Milly good-bye, as though it was for ever.

“You do not regret the message that you send to Laurence?” she whispered; “if so, my dear, I will not say a word about this meeting.”

“I do not regret it,” answered Milly.

So they parted; and Milly, the daughter that might have been, stood very white and firm at the open cottage-door, and watched the messenger proceed upon her way.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AWKWARD POSITION FOR A HERO.

WAS the reasoning good of all these friends of Laurence Raxford? Was the correct solution to this riddle of love's perplexities offered by the good folk interested in our hero? Given two women in love with one man—with a man supposed to have been in love with both of them—one woman standing apart from him, maintaining that it was for ever, and pointing to the other waiting for him patiently—to find if it was better for Laurence Raxford to marry the woman who wanted him, than to mourn for the maiden who was beyond his reach.

Milly had also wished that he should marry Hester Fyvie—had talked again of his past promise, and seen, as she thought, how a peaceful life would evolve from the union that she recommended, and end all doubts for good. When

he was married, everybody could settle down, feeling sure that the best had come to pass, and to make the best of the result was surely everybody's duty.

Laurence knew what Mr. Fyvie's wishes were, though Mr. Fyvie had grown despondent concerning them of late ; the old gentleman—the old friend—would have preferred the clerk for a son-in-law, to Mr. Charles Engleton of the great house. He did not want a rich man for his daughter's husband ; and though he respected Mr. Engleton, and believed that he would have done his duty by Hester, still his heart was set on Laurence. Mrs. Fyvie, when she had time to rouse herself from her customary apathy, was almost of the same opinion, though she thought a little more of the great house, and a little less of Laurence, after Engleton's proposal. It would be comfortable to know that the old place still belonged to the family, and if Hester could only make up her mind to like Mr. Engleton, why it might be the beginning of better times again. But she kept this wish to herself, and agreed with everything that her husband said ; she would not have uttered one feeble protest against Laurence becoming Hester's lord and master ; if it was to be

—so be it—there was an end to uncertainty at least, and the smiles would be back again on Hester's face. She would have preferred to talk the matter over with her strong-minded sister, Mrs. Llewellyn, but that lady kept to Tavvydale House, with her husband and daughter, as though no relations by blood were close at hand. Mrs. Llewellyn had resented their fall in life as an insult to herself and a slur upon the family. Mr. Fyvie was a parvenu, and he had come to grief, as parvenus will sometimes; she had often thought that he was far too extravagant for his means. So she remained at Tavvydale House, and Mr. Engleton began to wonder when the Llewellyns would go back to London. They never talked of going; they gave him Miss Llewellyn to walk with and to take rides with as often as they could conveniently manage it, and him; they clung affectionately to what Mrs. Llewellyn called "the home of their forefathers," as though Mr. Engleton was in unlawful possession of the same. All this, added to his recent disappointment, kept Charles Engleton depressed in spirits; it drew his attention to Government affairs, too, as connected with the Treasury department, and he sketched out a plan for saving

more money to the State, by allowing more time for business, and giving Treasury clerks fewer holidays during the year. By heaven ! they seemed to have all holidays, or Mr. Llewellyn's time must have been up weeks ago !

He sought refuge at Wheal Desperation, where the old stereotyped idea of what was best for Laurence was suggested from a new quarter.

"Upon my honour, Raxford, it's no good everybody being miserable," Engleton said one day ; "you had better marry Miss Fyvie, and have done with it. We shall all be comfortable, then, I am sure."

"If I were certain that Miss Fyvie would have me, I could not so insult her as to offer her my hand, with my heart full of love for another."

"Yes—but the other—you know——"

"Well—what of the other ?" asked Laurence, sternly.

"She can't have you," replied Engleton, stammering a little ; "it's not the correct thing to have you."

"I wonder that you can recommend me to adopt this course—you of all men, professing to admire Miss Fyvie."

"Upon my soul, I never shall admire another girl!" cried Engleton, enthusiastically; "but she won't have me, and she's miserable—everyone can see that. And you *were* engaged to her—that makes all the difference."

"Would you mind coming into the mine to-day? I want you to see the effects of this new powder," said Laurence, shutting the door suddenly in the face of further argument.

"I shall be most happy; and about the new shaft for air, that I fancied might answer. Has the design come back from Mertram's?"

"Yes. They sent it back by return of post."

"What did they say about it?"

"That it was thoroughly impracticable."

"Oh! did they?" said Engleton, looking somewhat surprised. "Well, we'll go into the mine now. Have you seen the plan?"

"Not yet."

"Look at it to-night—you'll find it as simple as it can be. The fact is, they can't make enough out of the job, to render it worth their while to undertake it. I hate selfish people!"

He was unselfish himself, at any rate, or he would have never placed Hester Fyvie's felicity so

far apart from his own. He was ready, like Milly Athorpe, to make a sacrifice for the common weal.

At home Laurence had his mother to charge him with the old story. He grew angry at last, and one evening shut up his book, leaned his arms across the table, and prepared to do battle with her, and end this worry for good.

"What is the objection of all my friends—my kind, but over-officious friends—to leaving me as I am? Whom I marry concerns myself, rather than other people."

"Well, Laurence," protested his mother, "that is no reason that you should fly into a bad temper about it. You never used to have any tempers at all—and I'm sure, in all your life, you never gave me a cross word."

"I hope that I never shall," said Laurence, softening. "I'm cross with myself, and with your arguments, perhaps, but not with you. Why, you are the one friend left me!"

"You will not listen calmly to me now," said the mother.

"There, I have put away my books on purpose to listen to-night; let us settle the matter by a long talk concerning it—a long last talk, mother,

and then the key turned for ever on this abominable skeleton."

"I don't know what you mean about skeletons," said the mother, "unless it is that you're becoming nothing but skin and bone. It's no good thinking of Milly, now—harassing yourself about a girl who has a sick aunt to nurse, and all that."

"I am content," said Laurence. "I stand apart from her—I am trying to forget her. I respect her wish that I should never cross her path, to disturb her by a sight of me. I have not seen her since she told me that she should never marry me!"

"That's something to say—but it is not all."

"What more can I say or do?"

"Forget her, and remember Hester."

"Hester Fyvie is nothing to me."

"You asked her once——"

"I know," cried Laurence, "don't remind me of my great folly. I was a blackguard, a scamp, a liar, everything that was vile, to make love to a woman without reflecting whether I could be true to her for life."

"There you go again!—firing off at the slightest word."

"All this, mother, I have heard before," said Laurence, lowering his voice again; "you will tell me next that we were engaged, and that I had no right to give her up."

"You never gave her up, Laurence."

"What makes you say that?" said Laurence, nervously.

This was his own thought, or the thought that he believed to be in Hester Fyvie's mind.

"You told her once that you did not set her free—that it was not your wish, you listened to her assertion that she resigned all claim upon you, and released you from your word—but you never accepted your freedom, and your silence, Laurence, may have left a hope with her."

"We thoroughly understand each other," said Laurence; "I could not coolly tell her that I did not want her for my wife—she set me free, and wished me happiness apart from her."

"But you *were* silent."

"How do you know all this?" said Laurence; "surely Hester has not related this story to you?"

"She told her father—her mother—the particulars of that first meeting between you when you came back to Tavvydale; she has told them since,

on the night of Mr. Engleton's dinner-party—that in her heart she still felt herself engaged to you—there I promised Mr. Fyvie that I would never say a word about it to you, and now it has all escaped me! And he promised her that he would never mention it, too! Oh! dear, and now it has got round to you.”

“I thought Hester Fyvie a more sensible woman than this,” he said, his brow contracting; “she gave me up—she set me free by her own words.”

“Yes—but you——”

“I know—I know,” cried Laurence; “heaven's mercy on us, mother, you are not going to begin again!”

“And you're never cross with me, you say. Well, Laurence,” wiping her eyes with a corner of her handkerchief, “that's not quite true now.”

Laurence did not refute this statement. He might acknowledge by his silence that he had lost his temper, or he might not have heard the accusation. He sat staring at the great oil lamp upon the table, with his hands clutching his chin, and his brow lined and scored like a railway map. He was touched by Hester's devotion to him—her faith in him, though he looked so stern and hard

that his mother was afraid to say anything more upon the subject. He could not bear the thought of a woman being truer to him and her promise than he had been to her—of her loving him through all his want of love.

“Why cannot I be left to myself?” he said at last.

“Because you are unhappy.”

“I ask again where is the objection to leaving me as I am?” he said; “for I am *not* unhappy.”

“Ah! we all know better than that.”

“Is Milly unhappy, I wonder?”

“No—she is happy.”

“You know something about her, too,” he said, betraying again no small excitement; “what is it? Who has told you that she is happy?”

“Herself.”

“You have seen her, then, at last! Well, was it very strange that I should love her, mother?”

“Not very strange, perhaps.”

“Tell me all about her,” said Laurence; “how was she looking?—did you speak of me?—what did she say?”

Mrs. Raxford entered at once into the particu-

lars of her interview with Milly Athorpe—abridging the narrative of Milly's love for Laurence, but giving him the message that had been sent him at the last.

“Tell him that you have seen me, and that you have found me very happy and content. That I hoped that he was going to marry Miss Fyvie shortly, for her sake and for his word's sake!”

This the message which she sent to him—which she had begged his mother to remember that she sent “calmly and dispassionately.”

“She wishes that too, then. After all that I have told her—after all that has passed between us! And I respect no one's wishes but my own,” he said bitterly.

He opened his books, and feigned to commence a diligent perusal of them. The old subject was dismissed—he had discussed it deliberately ; it had been worn threadbare, now and for ever afterwards let them hold their peace concerning it. What the discussion had ended in his mother did not know—he did not know himself. There was no good result to follow ; she had given up all hope of good result. Everybody would remain miserable, of course.

Laurence went early to bed; left early for Wheal Desperation before his mother was up.

At the office, he found Bully Churdock waiting for him. This man was a friend of Milly's—a stanch and true one—even a lover of Milly's, as he was aware, and he shook hands with him.

“Well, Churdock, is there anything that I can do for you?”

“Ess—if you wull.”

“What is it?”

“You can take me on the mine, and I'll work for ye, twice as much as e'er a one in stock yonder.”

“We can find a place for you, Churdock. When will you come on the works?”

“Oh! I'll go at it at wunst, sir. I want to get reg'larly into work afore Sunday.”

“Very well.”

“You see,” with a sudden scratch to his head, “I'ze married on Sunday; and she wants to see me settled, and give up wrustling and foighting. So I settle down, as I said afore, at wunst.”

“Who is the happy bride, Churdock?”

“Poll Raffles. She was allers arter me, and she's as good as gould, and as purty a Devonshire lass as ony in the county—barring Milly, o' course.

You know that I wor fond o' that gal, Mister Raxford?"

"Yes—I have heard so."

"But it was like being in love with a grand lady you couldn't get near to, and who didn't care for you a bit," he said; "though I axed her to have me, for I worn't going to lose even that chance. I thought that I'd never marry, but I altered my mind, for Poll was precious cut up about it, and had been sweet on me so long! I didn't see the good of fretting about it any longer—and keeping everybody in a stew, and myself like an owl. So I said, 'Poll, here I be, if I be worth anythink to you.' And Poll jumped at me straight. And precious glad I am that it's all squared."

"I congratulate you, Churdock. Will you put yourself in Captain Peters's hands, and tell him to find you the best place that he can."

"Thankee, Mr. Raxford. I wull, and cheerful."

Laurence went back to his office, and thought of Churdock and Churdock's reasoning. This was a case not unlike his own, and in Churdock's philosophy might he not read his lesson? If, after all, he could make one woman happy, and brighten her

father's home, as well as his mother's, might it not be well for him? He had a promise to keep, they all said—even Milly had sent him that message again, and it had rendered him more resolute in consequence—or more desperate—he scarcely knew which.

Let it end so. He was tired of striving against everybody's wishes—setting his puny will against an army that opposed him.

“Mr. Waters,” he said five minutes afterwards, “I am going back to Tavvydale.”

“Very well, sir. All things moving on very comfortably, sir, and no necessity to return, if there's anything of importance to keep you away.”

“Do you think that it is a matter of importance, then, Mr. Waters,” asked Laurence, “that takes me from business to-day?”

“You are looking very grave, sir,” was the reply; “and as I have missed for a long while that old bright look of yours, I fancy that there's something in the wind. Excuse me mentioning this—it is every bit fancy, of course—for there has been nothing new for weeks to talk about, and yet you've been getting graver every day.”

"This is a crisis," said Laurence. "I shall return with a lighter heart, I hope."

"I'll wish you joy," said the old clerk.

Laurence departed in the horse and chaise which was at his disposal as general manager of the mines. He drove direct to his stables at Tavistock, and returned at a rapid pace through the town, meeting Miss Fyvie on the outskirts.

"The very one I wished to see," he said after shaking hands with her. "Are you very busy?"

"No—I was going to market for papa."

"Will you walk with me for five or ten minutes first?" he said. "I have come from the mine to ask your advice."

"Yes—I will come with you, Laurence."

They turned back into the town, leaving it presently on their left, and passing to that lover's walk by the side of the deep river, where the Tavistockians had made love from ages remote—all very still and picturesque that calm morning, with the leaves not all gone from the great trees, and the stream, like molten silver, crossed and re-crossed by the shadows of the branches.

They sat down side by side on the second rustic seat, and then Laurence and she looked steadily at

each other again, and hers was the longest and most unwavering gaze.

"Hester," he said, in a low voice, "my friends remind me that I have not acted well by you—as if I had need to be reminded of that ! But I had your forgiveness—and I thought myself absolved."

"All that there was to forgive—freely forgiven, Laurence."

"We were engaged to one another—you were the first woman to whom I ever confessed an attachment. I promised to be true to you."

"And I cleared you from that promise."

"You promised to be true to me, and I never cleared you from that. You have been true—more true than the object of your faith deserved."

"I have been true," was the answer made, with all her characteristic quickness, "because I could not help it."

"But——"

"But I was not acting wisely or generously to you. For you have felt of late days hampered by that resolution, which I thought that I had hidden pretty well. Who told you that——"

She paused, and left Laurence to guess at the

inquiry that she might have made. He understood her and answered,

"My mother."

"Ah! my poor secret was ill-kept by my friends. My father and your mother have laid their wise heads together for our benefit, and that amiable conspiracy has done us both good, and set us acting for ourselves. Well, Laurence," she said, speaking very rapidly, "shall I ask you to take pity on me at last, and make me your wife?"

"No, Hester," he answered, in a suppressed voice—"not yet!"

She was strong and brave, and did not flinch at his denial.

"Shall I ask you to set me free from the promise that I made to you? The promise to be true and faithful to the end?"

"Ah! yes," he answered quickly, "ask me that, and take the last load away from my conscience! For I love Milly—pardon me saying this—as I love no one in the world. I can't give her up, though they tell me that she can never be my wife. I would resist all the foolish but well-meant advice of the friends around me, and leave them without one reason for their arguments. I would ask you to

forgive me, and absolve me, Hester—to give me strength to wait *yourself* for Milly. There, I am very cruel—I am but thinking of myself, and acting unmercifully towards you—but I have been driven to this, and my last hope of her I cannot let escape.”

Hester touched his arm quickly. She was paler perhaps than her wont, but there was no anger, disappointment, or mortification in her glance.

“Well—give me up, Laurence! It is late in the day to ask you, but it was a foolish promise, which a vain and obstinate girl made to herself, perhaps to spite herself, or to foster a dream that had long passed away with her—and you. There, I ask you to give me back my promise to keep true to you.”

“I give it back,” he murmured.

“Released from my word, I feel more free,” she said, “free to think of you as a brother, Laurence—to advise you like a sister. May I advise you now?”

“Yes—if you will—if you can, Hester. For I feel utterly cast down.”

“Keep strong for Milly’s sake,” she said; “she loves you, and you rank her first of all women in

your thoughts. Wait for her like a man. If you should never marry, why, you will be happier, knowing that you have been true to each other; then, if she or you were forced into marriage with another for pity's sake—wait for her—pray for her!”

Before he could reply Hester Fyvie was gone. When he came to himself, as a man out of a swoon might come, he was sitting alone on the bench under the trees, gazing at the bright water.

“Yes, I will wait for her,” he said; “I will wait for her for ever!”

END OF BOOK IV.

B O O K V.

THE FIFTH ACT.



CHAPTER I.

WAITING.

FIRM to one purpose, Laurence Raxford became a better man ; more like his old self. He had not wavered in his love. He had never been a weak man, although the weakness of others caused him pain. Had the letter which Hester Fyvie wrote to him long ago reached his hands, he would surely have married her—keeping firm to his word, and trying to think that he had never loved Milly Athorpe. Now all was settled ; he was wholly free to think of Milly, and to wait for her. There was a pleasure in thinking that he was young, with years of life before him, and years of life before her. There might come a time when she *would* be free to love him again. Their paths, diverging so much now, might meet in the after time, and if they went on and on, further apart, till they passed

beyond earth's boundary, still she would be faithful and true to the last, he was assured.

He gave no thought to the weak state of Mrs. Athorpe—he framed not one wish that death should sweep her away, as an obstacle that stood between him and his love ; he believed that she would grow strong again, and he only hoped that her husband might come back, hale and strong too, and take her away to his new home. That fact accomplished, the world placing more credit to the account of Mrs. Athorpe, Jonathan in Tavvydale as an important witness to her fairer fame, and Milly alone in the world—then his chance might come again. He was waiting for strange events to happen, but he waited patiently, and his mother was glad to see a change in him.

Engleton, knowing not that Laurence had already followed his advice, said to him again one day,

“I say, Raxford, is it really single blessedness all the days of your life?”

“I have proposed to Miss Fyvie, and been rejected.”

“Eh?—nonsense—what's that?”

“The day after you badgered me last, I—told

Miss Fyvie that I was ready to marry her—that is, I would have told her, if she had allowed me. But she nipped my offer in the bud, and would not have me.”

“Really !” said Engleton, rubbing his hands together, “really now, I don’t know that I am very sorry. How difficult it is to understand these women !”

“Very,” asserted Raxford.

“If she had a chance of having you back again, and would not have you, why, she could not have cared a great deal about you, after all. That’s how I put it.”

“I hope that that’s the correct version.”

“It’s not flattering to your vanity, though.”

“Never mind that.”

The two young men laughed at this, and were closer friends from that day. Engleton had offered Laurence the best advice in his power, but he was not sorry, as he had confessed, that it had turned out unprofitably. He had always liked Laurence Raxford, but he liked him all the more for leaving the path open to Hester Fyvie still. He had been once rejected, but he, in good time, would make another venture, after preparing the way well

beforehand, and offering stronger proofs, if possible, of his affection for her. Meanwhile, he was perplexed concerning other ladies who had become difficult to understand, and he was inclined, by way of return, to seek advice from Laurence.

"Have you much to do to-day?"

"Not a great deal."

"Just come outside the office with me. I'm in a regular fix at home."

"Indeed!—how is that?"

They went out of the office together, and walked up and down the broad space of ground before the house—Engleton full of excitement as usual.

"I don't know what to do with the Llewellyns," he said dismally; "they won't go home! It's a most absurd situation, but there they are—and, so far as I can see—there they are likely to remain."

"You are tired of your guests, then?"

"Well, yes. How old Fyvie used to stand it, the Lord knows—perhaps relationship had something to do with it."

"What does your sister think of it?"

"Oh! she laughs, and makes a joke of it all, which is rather aggravating. You see, she takes

things coolly, and I am naturally of an excitable disposition. She says—it's very ridiculous, but it makes me nervous, for all that—that they will not quit the house until I have made an offer of marriage to Miss Llewellyn."

"Why do you not—and get rid of them."

Mr. Engleton was not a good hand at a jest; all his life he had had a habit of regarding things with decorum. He stared hard at Laurence, and then said,

"I don't suppose you mean me to take that seriously, Raxford?"

"Well—no."

"Then it was not worth treating the matter flippantly. I never regarded your affairs in that light."

"I beg pardon, Mr. Engleton," said Laurence.

"Very glad to see you so lively, and all that," said Engleton; "a pleasant change, that shows a better frame of mind. You can't tell me, I suppose, how many holidays are allowed to principal clerks at the Treasury?"

"I cannot."

"Two months seem nothing for them. That old Llewellyn talks about two months' leave of ab-

sence as if it were two days. And Government losing his services all this time!"

"Government gets on without him, at all events."

"I'm obliged to invent all kinds of excuses to escape these people—especially Mrs. Llewellyn and her daughter. Now, I have no earthly object in coming here to-day—but here I am, in self-defence."

"Some months ago, I used to fancy that you were a little attentive to Miss Llewellyn."

"Common politeness—a respect for her relationship to the Fyvies, that's all. But the old woman—that's Mrs. Llewellyn, I mean—talks as if I really had been very polite to her daughter."

"What does Miss Llewellyn say?"

"My opinion is," lowering his voice, "that she's half an idiot, and that the family is trying to disguise it till she's married. She hasn't a single idea of her own upon anything—and she's ready to marry anyone her mother points out, at a moment's notice. She has received her orders to look after me, and I assure you it's becoming hard work to escape her vigilance. You cannot suggest an idea to get rid of them gracefully, Raxford—I want a new mind to assist me, and I

don't care to act churlishly in any way, of course. I asked them in the first instance because I thought Hester would call to see them now and then, and she calls not. What shall I do?"

"You have not a plan, then, of your own?"

"For once," he confessed, "I have not a single plan!"

"I can only recommend that you should take Mr. Llewellyn aside, and ask him to go."

"My dear Raxford, I could not do that!"

"Or suppose that you receive an invitation from a friend to spend a fortnight somewhere?"

"They would mind my house till I returned, and perhaps I should have some trouble to get into it, when I came back. Besides," said he, "I wish to remain near Tavvydale for awhile—and," with a stamp of his foot, "I'll not be driven out of my own house by a Welchman."

At this moment a four-wheeled chaise, occupied by the Llewellyns, appeared in the yard, to the dismay of Mr. Engleton.

"Thought that we would fetch you, my boy," cried Mr. Llewellyn, waving his whip triumphantly round his head; "jump in, Engleton—they're going to see the Lydford Fall, and drop me here by the

way. If you don't mind Mrs. Llewellyn driving—she's a good whip—you can sit behind with Jane."

Miss Llewellyn, on the back seat, began to draw her skirts together to make room for Mr. Engleton.

"Mr. Raxford," said Engleton, with a wave of the hand in Laurence's direction.

The Llewellyns had, up to this time, ignored the presence of that gentleman.

"Oh!—ah! how d'ye do, Raxford?" said Llewellyn; "still at the old game, I see. Nothing daunted by making a mess of the last undertaking."

"Neither daunted by difficulties, nor—impertinence," said Laurence; "the ladies are well, I trust?—good morning."

"Very abrupt—very abrupt, indeed," said Mr. Llewellyn, as Laurence marched into the counting-house; "he'll ruin your business, Engleton, if you keep him long here."

"He don't take orders—so he don't frighten the customers," said Engleton, drily.

"I never can understand what people see in Mr. Raxford," said Mrs. Llewellyn; "there's a want of polish about him, which betrays his origin."

Still, I *suppose* that he's a man to be trusted."

"I have an idea that way," said Engleton; "between ourselves, rather than lose him, I'd give him a partnership in the mine again."

"Good God!" ejaculated Mr. Llewellyn.

"But you need not let this go any further," said Engleton, gravely.

"You may depend upon me, that it shall *not*," said Mr. Llewellyn, with decision.

"You would repent the step to your dying day, just as my poor brother-in-law will," said Mrs. Llewellyn, with a dismal shake of the head; "but he was no judge of character, and I think that you are."

"Ah! I may be," said Engleton, sententiously.

"And as for partnership," remarked Mr. Llewellyn, on whose mind Mr. Engleton's hints had made a serious impression, "you had better keep a fine property like this to yourself, or take some sensible, middle-aged man, with a knowledge of the world, into your confidence."

Mr. Engleton looked very much alarmed.

"I think we'll start for Lydford at once."

"Very well. Jump in, then," said Mr. Llewellyn. "I think of a day's shooting in the pre-

serves myself. I can ride your horse home, I suppose?"

"Mr. Llewellyn, you'll come with us, I hope. You've brought us out."

The voice was metallic and sonorous; Mr. Llewellyn succumbed to the warning.

"Very well, madam," he grumbled; "but I hate waterfalls—you know that. I got my shoes full last time I was here, and nearly caught my death of cold. You pushed me in," he said, venomously, to Mr. Engleton, now ensconced at the back, with Miss Llewellyn.

"Yes, I think I remember something about it."

"Ah! you would have thought 'something about it' if you had been in the water instead of me," he said, lashing his host's horse unmercifully, as they drove away.

As they whirled by the counting-house window, Laurence looked from his desk at the *cortège*, and saw that Mr. Engleton was making a grimace at him.

"I hope that they'll not catch him for a son-in-law," was Raxford's fervent wish. "I trust that he is too sharp a man to walk into their trap."

Laurence went home early that afternoon. The

nights were long now, and he had begun the wholesome and friendly practice of reading aloud to his mother. He was home early every night in the week but one—where he went to that night, or whether he stopped late at the office, he never told Mrs. Raxford. Once or twice he had been seen in the village of Tavvydale, it was murmured, and though Milly had not seen him, the rumour reached her ears, and scared her. Scared her with the assurance, too, that he might not be re-engaged to Hester Fyvie—which was not wholly disheartening, though it told her that he was single and “unsettled” still.

Laurence began reading to his mother that evening a new poem of Tennyson’s. He had been always fond of poetry; since he had come to Devon he had been more than commonly poetic, and his mother would have preferred a sensible fiction, or an exciting book of travels—which is about the same thing—to being deluged with verse night after night.


However, she always expressed her delight to hear him read—and it never occurred to Laurence that too much poetry might be objectionable. If his mother grew weary, and closed her eyes—

"Just to rest them a bit from the light, my dear!"
—Laurence, absorbed in his theme, paid but little heed to his companion, and went on to the end of the legend, where the lovers clasped hands, and everybody was in a state of bliss—or where the lovers, friends, and relations went all of a heap to the cemetery. For poems have uncertain *denouements*, and poets kill off their surplus stock with less compunction than novelists.

Laurence was reading—and reading well. But the night was far advanced now, and Mrs. Raxford, with her chin on her bosom, and her needle-work trailing from her lap to the floor, had withdrawn herself into dream-land, and was at that present moment bargaining for a pair of fowls in Tavistock, with the shopkeeper talking in a loud, high-flown voice, behind the counter at her.

Peace and general satisfaction in Laurence's little house then, when a loud and prolonged knocking, of a fancy description, stopped Laurence in the middle of a verse, and frightened his mother into an upright position, with hands clasped together in supplication.

"Good gracious!—what is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Raxford.



"It's a knock," said Laurence, tetchily, for he objected to be stopped in his reading.

"I hope that nothing is the matter anywhere," said Mrs. Raxford. "Whenever I hear a knock at odd times of the night, I always fancy that something's going to happen. And the fancy very often comes to me, Laurence."

"This is not an odd time of the night, mother," said Laurence; "it is only nine o'clock."

"I hope that Mr. Fyvie is not ill," said the lady, still oppressed by gloomy ideas; "he has not been full of spirits lately—and he was telling me, only this morning, that he felt very anxious about Jonathan."

"If you please, sir," said the little maid-servant entering the room, "it's Mr. Whiteshell from London."

Mr. Whiteshell from London again!—then something had happened to bring that old man to Devonshire. Mystery and trouble always accompanied him.

"Show him in at once," said Laurence; and before he could place a chair for his guest, James Whiteshell was in the room.

He came close to Laurence, gripped his arm,

and looked up very anxiously into his face.

"Have you seen him?—has he been here, Mr. Raxford?"

"Nobody has been here. Whom did you expect?"

"Captain Athorpe!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MOON AT THE FULL.

MR. JAMES WHITESHELL sat down, and after his customary habit wiped his forehead with his great silk handkerchief ; rose upon becoming aware of the presence of a lady, and executed his most elaborate bow, resumed his seat, and rubbed his hands nervously up and down his knees.

“This is the last place that I had a hope of. I can’t think now what has become of him.”

“He is found, then?” said Laurence with excitement.

“Oh ! dear no—he’s lost again.”

“But you discovered him?”

“No—he discovered me.”

Mr. Whiteshell did not mean intentionally to be aggravating ; he was disturbed in mind by arriving at the end of his search, without a profitable

result, and took time to collect his ideas.

"I shall be glad when you are more explanatory, Mr. Whiteshell," said Laurence severely.

"I'll trouble you to give me time, sir," replied Mr. Whiteshell, exhibiting his usual dignity of demeanour beneath reproof; "I have come from London to-day, and have been running about Tavvydale, and the Cleft, and everywhere else, since five o'clock this evening. As impatient as ever, Mr. Raxford!"

"Pardon me, but I am naturally excited," said our hero; "if Captain Athorpe is in this part of the country, there is no telling what may be the consequences."


"He is perfectly harmless."

"Is he sane, then?"

"Yes—save when the moon's at the full."

"God bless me!" cried Mrs. Raxford, "and it's a full moon to-night—I read it in the almanack!"

"Yes—that accounts for it," said Mr. Whiteshell, wiping his forehead again. "I'll trouble you for a glass of water, with a dash of brandy in it—and then I can manage to impart my information."



Mr. Whiteshell had evidently been disturbed by his journey, and its unprofitable result. It was not till he had imbibed the liquid that he had mentioned, that he assumed a certain degree of composure.

"You will excuse my asking for brandy and water in a friend's house," said he, "but it is a friend's, I think?"

He looked inquiringly at Laurence, who answered—

"Yes—a friend's."

"We have had our little differences—we have not always understood each other—but I think that we are friends at last. Now, let me tell you all I know concerning Captain Athorpe."

Laurence nodded his head impatiently.

"Two months ago Captain Athorpe came into my rooms in Milk Street, and asked me to take care of him, just as if he had been a lost child. I did not know him; he walked so feebly, and his hair was so grey. He was very weak in intellect, but he was not dangerous; he had remembered my address, he said, and as he had no friends in all the world but me, he had come to ask me to take care of him. He gave me six hundred and fifty pounds

to mind—all in notes, which he had sewed in the lining of his coat.”


“Where had he been?”

“Wandering about the country for awhile, then laid up in a workhouse, where they took all the nonsense out of him, by giving him lots of leeches every day, till he was shot out of the place quite cured, and as bloodless as boiled veal. He’s a ghost to look at, and until, you’re used to him, it’s rather startling. When he looked at me first, through the parlour window, with his white face pressed close to the glass, I was as near having a fit as ever I was in my life.”

Mrs. Raxford executed a slight leap in the air, and then proceeded to close the window-shutters for the night.

“He was not stronger than a child when he first came to me,” continued Whiteshell. “You may guess how weak he was, when he came to *me* for moral support—me, whom he used to call a driveller and potterer! He put trust in me at once, too, and told me of the notes, which the workhouse people would, he thought, have been very glad to find.”

“He was not recognized?”



"Oh! no. He was very taciturn, too, and not likely to betray himself. When he first came, he did not recollect all the past."

"That was a mercy to him."

"He told me that his wife was dead, and that Milly had left the Cleft; but he did not appear to remember the circumstances that had occurred on the night before he burned his house down. He was taken ill again at my place, and when he came back, as it were, to life again, he was weaker than ever, but more sane."

"Did you tell him that Mrs. Athorpe was living?"

"No. I was advised not by the doctor, whom I took into my counsel," answered Whiteshell. "Athorpe never spoke of the cause of his wife's death, and it was not considered safe to mention the story to him. But when the moon came round to the full, he remembered it, and accused himself of having murdered her. Then I told him that Inez was alive still, and he cursed me for attempting to deceive him. And as the moon waned, so he fell back into the old man, remembering nothing of the past."

"Is Milly aware of the charge that you have undertaken?"

"She is now. I have been with her to-night, to put her on her guard, and prepare Inez, if she think it necessary. I thought that he would go to Tavrydale, after eluding me, but he has not been seen there."

"You have been to the Cleft?"

"Yes."

"And to Wheel Desperation?"

"No—not there. That is a good thought."

"The old habit might take him to the place."

"And pitch him down the shaft," said Mr. Whiteshell, starting up. "Let us be off at once. I'm as strong as a lion—and nothing tires me."

"You would not like to rest here, and leave the remainder of this task to me?"

"No—he is my charge," said Mr. Whiteshell proudly; "and I think that I can only manage him. He has given me a new object in life, and I feel as if I should not like to part with him—much less to part with him like this. And it is very odd to see that man of all men trustful in me. He's a better judge of character *now*," he added conceitedly, "than he ever was when he was strong!"

"You will be very careful, Laurence," said

Mrs. Raxford. "I don't much like your going off in search of madmen in the moonlight."

"Captain Athorpe is not strong, madam," said Mr. Whiteshell. "When I tell you that I can hold him down, there is no fear that he will master this young Hercules. Indeed, there is no fear of him offering any violence at all."

Thus assured, Mrs. Raxford did not enter any further protest against Laurence's departure. She knew the history of the Athorpes pretty well now, and she took hope to herself, rather than fear, at the news which James Whiteshell had brought. A little darkness—a shade more of mystery, perhaps—but afar off the glimmer of the dawn where there might be hope for Laurence. She was a sanguine woman—and this might be, she thought, the beginning of the end.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Laurence and Whiteshell were driving along the high-road towards the old scene of action. Amongst the Dartmoor Hills, Laurence had met romance first; here had ensued the joys and sorrows of his life; here in one short year had been matter for melodrama almost—love, jealousy, and murder—the staple commodities for transpontine establishments

—had followed his presence at Wheal Desperation.

The sky was cloudless, and the road to the mine was as light as day. Even the sulky Dartmoor tors became a silvery grey as the moon rose higher in the heavens.

“Yes—the moon’s at the full !” said Laurence.

“That is the worst of it,” replied Mr. White-shell, shivering a little with the cold ; “I can’t depend upon what gets into his head, when the moon’s like that. And yet the last three weeks have given me great hopes of him.”

“He may be still in London.”

“No—I made inquiries at the London terminus, and one guard remembers assisting him into a third-class carriage, and another scolding him for not showing his ticket with the average degree of promptitude. They described him accurately enough.”

“And at Devon ?”

“The train came in at night, and no one appears to have noticed him at Tavistock. But we shall find him presently—I don’t despair myself.”

They were silent for awhile ; then Mr. White-shell, full of his subject, said,

"If you could but imagine how Athorpe has disappointed me, Mr. Raxford. I had arranged quite a pretty scene of reconciliation between Athorpe and Inez—of lifting the weight of misery from the minds of both of them. *That* lifted, I believed that Athorpe would be stronger again in mind, and Inez in body—and that with time and care they might be to each other a support and comfort. I had noticed last week that he was stronger in himself—remembered the past—the best part of the past, before Jonathan Fyvie upset everybody. Only a day before he took this freak into his head, he asked me what had become of the violin that he had given me early in the summer."

"If we could find him, there would be hope of him," said Laurence, becoming sanguine himself at these reminiscences.

"Yes, I think there would," said Whiteshell; "poor old gentleman, where can he have got to? He's twenty years younger than I am, at least, but I feel somehow like a son to him—it's very odd. What do you propose doing at the mine?"

"Searching the place."

"I'm no hand at that," said Whiteshell; "for I

don't know the locality, and shall very likely kill myself. If we could only find somebody in the grounds that knew every turn of it as well as you do. Who's that walking up and down before the office?"

They were close upon the place now, and Laurence reined in his horse. It was someone who knew every turn of the mining ground better than Laurence Raxford, and she came towards them as they stopped.

"Milly!" cried both men in a breath.

"Yes—I could not rest. I did not tell Inez—it would have but kept her more anxious about him than I was. When she was asleep for the night, I thought that I would come on here—I have asked a neighbour to be watchful till my return."

"The same idea that your uncle might come to the mine has suggested itself to Mr. Raxford—a gentleman whom you remember, perhaps?" said Mr. Whiteshell, caustically.

"Mr. Raxford is very kind," murmured Milly, looking at him.

"I hope that you are well, Milly?" he asked.

"Yes—very well," she answered.

So the lovers met again, with one thought common to both of them. When Mr. Waters had shuffled downstairs, and expressed his astonishment at the late visitors, the search was begun, each taking a separate route, and each meeting, after an hour's time, in front of the office, baffled and disheartened.

"No success?" said Laurence.

"No, he is not here," replied Milly; "it seems as if we were never to be successful ever again."

"I wonder if he has gone down the mine, now," suggested Mr. Waters, who, interested in the search, had been wandering about with Mr. Whiteshell, totally oblivious to the fact that he had his carpet slippers on.

"I will go down," said Laurence.

But before he could put his resolution into effect, and whilst Mr. Whiteshell was explaining that Captain Athorpe's strength would not have allowed of the descent, a man on horseback rode through the gates, that had been left ajar—so suddenly and swiftly, that the searchers there, whose nerves were highly strung that night, started at his appearance in their midst.

"You—you have been sent here for me?" cried Milly.

"Yes," he answered—"if you are Milly Athorpe, I have."

CHAPTER III.

THE LLEWELLYNS ARE SURPRISED.

IT is not an unnecessary aggravation of the reader's feelings to change the scene to Tavvydale House. It is requisite for the proper development of the little plot that is left us in the few chapters between us and "FINIS."

It may be remembered that Charles Engleton was borne away triumphantly by his captors to the Lydford cascade, and that the task devolved upon him during the journey of making himself agreeable to the fair maiden by whose side he found himself ensconced. This was never a task of any magnitude, for Miss Llewellyn did not require any great amount of attention, and it was fortunate for her peace of mind through life that anything amused her, although nothing excited her. Her mother had endeavoured to teach her to behave herself in society, and the result was tolerably

successful to Mrs. Llewellyn, if not to society in general. Mrs. Llewellyn, figuratively speaking, had sat on Jane's impulses, Jane's wishes, Jane's little early tempers, flattening all character out of her. She had employed strong-minded governesses to do the same, and Mr. Llewellyn—a man who had always objected to nonsense—had assisted with a “clincher” now and then, until the subject had arrived at perfection. It may be said here that the same experiments had been tried on Master Llewellyn, who flitted through an early chapter or two of this book ; it was in process, and the Llewellyns were sanguine about that period, but no mention was made of the son now. He had run away with his mother's lady's-maid first, and then clean out of the country afterwards, glad to be rid of his family, at any price—even at the price of a reward, which his stern father had offered for him for successfully imitating his signature to a cheque for five hundred pounds, that he could not conveniently spare from his “balance.”

But the Llewellyns had been very successful with Jane ; she was quiet and ladylike, and not liable to vulgar surprises—the fall of a rain-drop,

or the fall of a thunderbolt, would not have made much difference in her expression of features. Engleton maintained that she had no expression at all, and therefore could not show any.

Engleton felt disagreeable after a while. He sat at the back of that pony-chaise, and thought of his wrongs, until he arrived at the conclusion that these Llewellyns were going a little too far, and taking too much advantage of his good-nature. If he had run away from them, they had no business to follow him to Wheal Desperation, and make a prisoner of him. They betrayed their motives too quickly, and those motives were objectionable.

Still Charles Engleton was a thorough gentleman, and though he did not start many topics of conversation, he answered politely all questions which Mr. and Mrs. Llewellyn put to him, and he even tried to interest his companion in a ruin on their right, which, being the flattest and blankest ruin in England, was not calculated to arouse to enthusiasm so quiet a young lady as Miss Llewellyn.

The whole task of making this journey to Lydford successful devolved, therefore, upon Mrs. Llewellyn, for her lord and husband had

entered his protest against the expedition, and was already sulking at having been forced to join the party; and how Mr. Llewellyn could sulk, his wife, and daughter, his servant, and his maid, and all the unlucky subordinates in his own particular branch at the "office" in London, knew to their cost. Mr. Llewellyn was inclined to give up the idea of arresting Charles Engleton as a son-in-law; he had, after all, more common sense than his wife, whose manoeuvres were as clumsy as a common mind could make them, and he saw that their host was now fairly on his guard. But Mrs. Llewellyn saw ahead of her nothing but success.

So they went to Lydford Fall—where many of us have been before them—put the chaise up at the farm-house, and slipped and scrambled down the path, towards the bed of the stream, Mr. Llewellyn, who objected to slipping, cursing all the way, as he dragged his better-half after him and upon him. Jane, of course, was left to the care of Mr. Engleton, and had to clutch him spasmodically at dangerous curves. Then they had stared at the water rushing down in no very great quantity from the rocks above them, and Mr. Llewellyn had ex-

pressed it as his opinion that the waterfalls in Devonshire were an utter sham, absurdity, and nuisance, and the sooner less fuss was made about them the better. He would lay a wager to any amount that there were not ten gallons there altogether, and *that* the miller at the top had turned on from his stream in order to make a display—he knew all about those dodges—he wasn't born yesterday! Finally, and to everybody's amazement—even to his own, for he had been particularly careful—he backed himself into two feet of water in his excitement, and stood in the stream shouting,

"There—I told you so! It's always the way. This isn't the first time I have had to risk my life in these damned places!"

The expedition was not successful, and when they were back at Tavvydale House to dinner, and Mr. Llewellyn would not speak all dinner-time, the promoter of the excursion was fain to acknowledge it herself.

"I think that I shall go home to-morrow," Mr. Llewellyn said to his wife, *sotto voce* in the drawing-room, where he found his voice again.

"Llewellyn—I would not think of it yet awhile."

"You can do as you like," he said. "I don't ask you and Jane to come with me."

"But I cannot see any excuse to stop if you talk of going. And it would be, Llewellyn, such an admirable match for Jane."

"Ah!—but it won't do."

"And you and Mr. Engleton are becoming great friends."

"I don't see it myself, madam," contradicted Llewellyn. "I don't like him. He's much too bumptious and opinionated for me."

"But Jane——"

"He don't care a fig for Jane—and I'm not astonished at *that*," said Mr. Llewellyn. "Besides, is he not looking after Hester?"

"Oh! that's all blown over."

"That's all you know about it," answered her rebellious spouse.

But he mentioned not again his intention to leave Tavvydale House, and though he would not, in his present temper, have confessed that Mrs. Llewellyn's remarks had had any effect upon him, still, tacitly, he had abandoned the project of returning home in the morning. He would stay and give his daughter Jane every chance; it would be a

capital thing to get rid of Jane, moping and puking about the house like an animated rag doll; and the ties of relationship might give him a share in the mine, or put him in the way of some good thing or other, which would add to the income he received from that beggarly Treasury.

He was an envious man, and coveted other men's goods. He was not an amiable character; no one was ever glad to meet him in the streets, or at a dinner-party; he looked down terribly upon people who received a less salary than himself—guaging their merits by their money—but he envied, and almost hated, everybody who had incomes above his own, and kept the horses and carriages which were never likely to become part of his appurtenances. He even looked upon Mrs. Llewellyn as his great mistake in life—possibly he was right, poor man! He had married her for birth—on account of the purity of the blood running in her veins—and he should have married for money, and been as well off as other people. And as for the purity of her blood—in all his life he had never known a woman come out so strong in pimples!

He was very tired after dinner, and thought

that he would go early to bed, and prematurely nurse the cold that he felt certain was coming on. He never got his feet wet in his life without suffering for it, and he had been fool enough to go floundering into a rivulet, when a baby might have known better than that. Mr. Engleton had asked him if he had done it on purpose; and well he might put the inquiry, considering the stupidity of the act.

He swallowed a cup of coffee, and went early to bed, dragging his unwilling wife after him. He did not want to sit up late, and play whist, and lose his money; he repeated that he wanted to nurse his cold in its early stages, and he ordered gruel and hot water into his dressing-room.

Mr. Engleton and his sister, not being partial to late hours, were willing to follow the example of their guests. They had adopted a country life, and were glad to fall into country habits with it, whenever occasion presented itself. Before ten o'clock Tavvydale House was locked up for the night, the servants were in their rooms, Mrs. Llewellyn was asleep, and Mr. Llewellyn was in the dressing-room adjoining, sitting close to a bright fire, with his dressing-gown round him, his

feet in hot water, and a basin of gruel on his knees.

He had been a quarter of an hour in this position, despite the prior remonstrances of Mrs. Llewellyn from the inner room; he was not going to hurry himself because his wife wanted to drop off into her first sleep; he knew perfectly well that she would go to sleep without him, if he left her to herself long enough. He had a cold to nurse, he shouted at her, and he was not going to be hurried for anybody.

He worried himself like a miserable, cross-grained fellow, as he was. He sat glowering at the red coals, and thinking of his own injuries—a red-haired man, with his back up like a cat's. He was in a mood to anathematize Tavvydale House, and all belonging to it; he had never liked the place or the people, and though he had saved a few pounds in housekeeping by his long stay with the Engletons, still he had put up with a great deal for the sake of economy.

If it was not for the chance of getting Jane off, he would not stop another day in the house; and though he could not see the probabilities of that event occurring, still his wife had spoken with

confidence, and women understood those things better than he did. He did not tell her so, lest it should make her conceited, but that impression fixed itself on his mind, after his fourth or fifth spoonful of gruel. The warmth of the gruel, and the soothing effect of hot water, gave a milder turn to his thoughts after that, and he pictured Jane as Mrs. Engleton, with a very handsome annual income settled upon her—an income from which he could borrow a few hundreds now and then.

“It would be a capital catch,” he said, aloud; “and I’ll say that that snoring old woman in the other room is a genius, if she manages it. Not that she ever managed anything very nicely yet, heaven knows! Hollo! what’s that?”

Mr. Llewellyn paused, with his spoon half-way to his mouth, and listened. There was a strange noise outside his room—a sputtering kind of noise on the other side of a door on his left, that was never opened—that was not unlike the crackling of wood.

“It’s the house on fire, possibly!” said Mr. Llewellyn, his red hair bristling somewhat with the idea; “that’s a nice thing to happen, I must say.

Running about stone passages, and into the garden after this footbath. I hope it's somebody else's house!"

The thought occurring to him that the house stood in several acres of its own ground, and the fact of the crackling noise being on the increase, took Mr. Llewellyn from his bath, and across the room to the door.

The key was in the lock, and turned with difficulty. He opened the door cautiously at last, and peered out into a dark lobby.

"I don't smell anything," he muttered; "but that's the cold coming on, confound it. If that noise continues, I shall alarm the house, and let other people look for it. Good gracious, it may be thieves, and there are Mrs. Llewellyn's jewels on the table!"

He was about to shut the door hastily again, when it was thrust suddenly back upon him, sending him backwards a few steps at the same time, as a strange being came into the room, and closed the door cautiously behind him.

"If you make a noise, man, it may cost you your life," said the new comer; "sit down, and let me ask you a question."

"Ye—ye—yes! but, good God! who are you?"

"A murderer."

"O-o-o-oh—a murderer!—indeed, sir!—really!"

Mr. Llewellyn sank into the chair that he had quitted, and burst into a cold perspiration—to think that he was closeted with a murderer, and no one near to give him help!

The intruder stood by the door, a man in a dark suit of clothes, torn and jagged in several places, as though he had been climbing over many obstacles in the way to his purpose—a man with a face that death could not have added a shade more ghastliness to, with white hair, moustache and beard tangled, matted and wild. A strange figure, that, coming at that hour thus suddenly upon the scene, might have scared hearts more courageous than the Treasury clerk's—for it was not an every-day face, and might not have belonged to this everyday world.

Mr. Llewellyn, in his fear, did not observe that the man leaned against the door for support after he had entered; he saw the movement only, and attributed the action to a settled resolve to bar his exit.

"I am Captain Athorpe—of Wheal Desperation—the man who killed his wife. You know me?"

"I—I can't say that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting you before," said Mr. Llewellyn, "therefore, *I* could not have done you harm in any way, you see."

"No," said Athorpe, gloomily, "it is not your life I want. I am not so mad but what I can tell one face from another."

"Well, that's a comfort, anyhow," said Llewellyn—"that's fair."

"Where is Jonathan Fyvie?—this is his father's house, and I have been hiding in it all day, in the hope of meeting him. I shan't be happy, or like myself, until I have killed him, sir."

"Lord save us!" ejaculated Llewellyn, "how shall I get rid of this bloody-minded vagabond?"

A vague idea of conciliating Captain Athorpe, of agreeing with him in everything, and humouring his inclinations, suggested itself to Mr. Llewellyn—that was the course to adopt he had read somewhere, and was grateful for recollecting at that juncture. He would humour him, if his presence of mind would allow of the process; but his knees were

knocking together with fright still, and his difficulty in articulating was enormous. His feet had become stone-cold by this time, and he cast one bewildered look round for the slippers that he had left in the other room.

"I wish no man harm, but him who injured me," muttered Athorpe—"that's all."

"I'm sure that's very fair indeed, captain," said Llewellyn, assuming a brisk and lively tone; "that's hon—hon—honourable and manly. Can I offer you anything?" helplessly taking down the basin of gruel from the mantel-piece, "not anything in this way, I mean, of course, but anything out of the cellar—sparkling Champagne, for instance? I—I can fetch it in a minute."

"I'd rather die than break bread, or drink in this house. This is the Fyvies' house."

"It used to be. They have left?"

"What's that?"

And Athorpe leaned forwards eagerly.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear friend. They have gone away—they came to ruin, and sold this house to Mr. Engleton. You remember Engleton—you'll be glad to see him. I'll just step out and tell him that you've called."

But Captain Athorpe made no way for him ; he stood against the door still staring wildly over Mr. Llewellyn's head at the opposite wall.

"Gone away," he said at last, "now, that's as black a lie as ever was uttered."

"I assure you that it's a fact, sir."

"I say that it is not," cried Athorpe, "and I am sure that he is in the house. He took my wife away from me—he blasted as honest and peaceful a home as ever made a man's heart light, and I have a claim to justice on him."

"Most decidedly," asserted his auditor, assuming the conciliatory again ; "I don't dispute the point at all—well, shall we try to find him ?"

"Yes—yes—I think we will."

"Perhaps you would not have any objection to wait till I put my stockings and boots on?" said Llewellyn ; "I find it rather chilly after a hot bath."

"I'll wait."

"Thank God !—thank you, sir—will you take a seat ?—I'll not keep you more than a minute—depend upon it we shall find him, Mr. Haycock."

Mr. Llewellyn passed with winged steps into the bed-room, and fell into the arms of his wife, stand-

ing rigid and stony, with a shawl round her, in the middle of the room.

"Don't leave me, Llewellyn—you took me for better, for worse—and you must not for—forsake me! He woke me up in a fright, and I've only just found strength to crawl out of bed."

"Hush!—don't make a noise—don't excite him, or he'll murder the two of us. Why don't you lie down till I come back again with assistance. He's perfectly harmless."

"He's raving mad!—I know him—I've heard of him—he did kill his wife nearly. Oh! what shall we do?"

"We'll alarm the house—that's what we'll do, if you'll only hold your jaw!" said this uncourteous helpmate.

"Shall I go?" in a stage whisper; "he don't know that I am here—and you might go back to him, and talk to him whilst you put your boots on."

"Go back to him!" cried her husband; "I'd sooner face the devil himself. Unlock the door, unlock the door, and we'll scream our hardest when we're in the passage."

They stole to the door together, opened it with

difficulty, as both hands grasped the key at once, rushed into the passage beyond, and tore along it for their lives, screaming "Thieves!" and "Murder!" as none but frightened people *can* scream.

The house was soon astir, and men and women with pale faces began to look from doors and over balusters, and gasp forth inquiries, to which no one answered. From the stillness of death to the noise of Babel was but one step.

"Llewellyn, what is this?" cried Engleton, appearing upon the scene, collaring the frightened man, and striving to shake an explanation out of him; "Mrs. Llewellyn, will you explain, please?"

"There's a mad—mad—madman in the house!" gasped Llewellyn, at last; "in my dressing-room—and all the razors on the table—Captain Hayband——"

"Athorpe—here!" cried Engleton; then he led the way back to the dressing-room, followed by everybody in the house, and found Athorpe, still with his back to the door, sleeping at his post, from sheer exhaustion.

He opened his eyes as they approached him.

"Where's Whiteshell?" he asked, vacantly;

"why has he left me like this?—he who promised to take care of me?"

"Athorpe, will you let me take care of you till I find your friends?"

"Yes—if you will, sir. I am dead beat!"

He tottered towards Engleton, pausing midway.

"Whose house is this?"

"Mine."

"Ah! it was *my* mistake, then. I am not so clear-headed as I used to be."

He took Engleton's arm, and the young man, with ready tact, gave orders for a messenger to start at once to Miss Athorpe's house in Tavvydale.

"You'll—you'll never keep this dangerous lunatic here!" cried Llewellyn; "you'll send for the police, I hope, at the same time!"

"He is very weak, and can't do much harm, poor fellow," answered Engleton; "I know the man, and will take care of him."

"It's not safe."

A bright idea suddenly seized Charles Engleton.

"Captain Athorpe is my guest till he is strong and well again. He only needs careful nursing.

See that the next room on the right of Mr. Llewellyn's be prepared for him."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mrs. Llewellyn.

"I'll not stop another hour in the house!" cried Llewellyn; "he's made a dead set at me, and he'll murder me, if I remain. Lend me your carriage, sir, and we'll try and catch the two o'clock mail train from Tavistock. You—you can send the luggage after us—if we stay here, we shall all be killed. I would not remain till morning for a thousand pounds!"

"My carriage is at your service—John, put the horses to, at once," said Engleton; "sorry to lose you, but if Captain Athorpe has got an impression on his mind that you are his enemy, it may be safer to depart."

"We'll—we'll go, Llewellyn," said his wife from behind the bed-curtains, in which for modesty's sake she had now enwrapped herself; "we'll go at once."

And away they went from Tavvydale House, long before the messenger had reached Milly's cottage, four miles away. They never revisited Mr. Engleton, and Tavvydale knew them no more.

"Captain Athorpe," said Engleton, as he led him

to his room gently, "you have done **some good** by dropping in here. Upon my word, I **am very glad** to see you!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

INEZ ATHORPE was sleeping soundly, when the messenger from Tavvydale House aroused her, and the main street, with his summons at the door. She had gone to bed well-pleased with herself and Milly; she had felt stronger, and, for an unaccountable reason, more hopeful of the future; she and Milly had talked long and earnestly of that past of which she had repented, and she had felt that night less querulous and jealous than she had been since her illness.

Once or twice a vague suspicion had seized her that Milly was anxious, for some reason or other, to lead the subject round to her lost husband—but she did not put her doubts to the test, lest Milly should think her weak and fidgety. Milly could not have heard of Athorpe, or she would have been

the first to speak of him—the first to break the news. She was only more hopeful, like herself, for she had spoken that night of the probabilities of the stricken man once more coming before them, as from spirit-land.

“How he comes—or in what fashion—I do not seem to care, Milly,” Inez had said when they were in their room together, and Milly was still sitting dressed upon her little cot in the corner, when Inez was in bed, “so that the chance is offered me to see him.”

“You would not be afraid of him?”

“No. Not if he was angry with me even, and unmerciful—which he will not be again.”

“Which he will not be again, we pray. Good night, Inez.”

“Good night. Ah!” with a quivering sigh, “what a good friend you have been to me—and what a tax upon your time and patience I have been to you. I think that your reward will come, Milly, even upon earth.”

“My reward is in your better health, Inez.”

“I don’t mean such a reward as that. But the great prize on which your silly heart was set once—you know?”

"Ah! I know," said Milly. "Now, good night again."

"Good night, my dear."

She fell off to sleep after that, into so deep and peaceful a slumber, that Milly felt courage to leave her and proceed in search of Uncle Oliver. That he might have gone to Wheal Desperation, had suggested itself to her as well as to Laurence, and she was anxious—intensely anxious—to find him. So she had departed—first warning a neighbour that Captain Athorpe had been heard of, and that she was going in search of him whilst Inez slept, if the neighbour would be watchful for a little while.

Then all at peace in Tavvydale, until the noisy message from Mr. Engleton.

Inez struggled out of sleep, crying—

"Milly—Milly—do you hear that!"

But Milly made no reply, and the weak woman paused to consider if it had been one of her own disturbed dreams, and whether it was kind to wake her niece, tired out with school duties, and attendance upon her. Inez did not usually reflect upon the inconveniences to which she subjected others—in her illness she had been selfish enough. This

was a good sign of convalescence, of bodily and mental improvement, when Inez thought that she would lie down again, and say nothing till the morning concerning the fright that she had had.

Then the knocking was repeated, and Inez could hear the shrill voice of her neighbour—one of the few who knew her story, and believed in it—begging some one without to make less noise.

“Milly, dear—some one *is* knocking!” she cried.

The room was light with the full moon that shone in through the latticed panes, but Milly's cot was in shadow by the wall. Still, sitting up in bed, Inez could define the outline of that cot, and there seemed a something new and strange about it, which, coupled with the silence, made Inez tremble very much.

“Stolen away, or dead!” she whispered to herself—“tired of me, or tired out with me. Or—thank God for that thought—shut out in the street, having gone for a moonlight stroll after I was asleep.”

She left her bed, and crossed the room to Milly's cot. Empty!

They were talking still in the street, and she

opened the window at once, and asked who was there?

"I've been sent to tell Miss Athorpe to come on to Tavvydale House."

"Didn't I ask you to be quiet?" cried the old woman next door. "It's nothing, Mrs. Athorpe—only Milly's wanted."

"But where is Milly?" inquired Inez.

"Gone for a walk—that's all," was the reply.

"What time is it?"

"Eleven."

"Ah! then there is something wrong!" cried Inez. "Milly would not leave the house so late as this."

"I'll come in to you, Mrs. Athorpe, at once—I've got the key," said the neighbour. "I think that I can explain it all. Don't distress yourself—all's well! You blockhead! Why don't you go on to the mine?"

"The mine—the mine!" cried Inez; "then Captain Athorpe has been found?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the man; "he's up at Tavvydale House—waiting."

"Well, or—ill?"

"Ill I should say, ma'am, certainly."

Inez fell back from the window, and the old woman, coming in with a light, found her lying in a swoon upon the floor.

"Here's my work cut out, surely," she muttered bending over her.

But Inez very rapidly recovered, and began with feverish haste to dress herself.

"I will go to him at once."

"You—dear heart—why, it's impossible!"

"No, it is not—I am a strong woman now—I will go!"

"But it really is imp——"

"Did you not hear that he was ill?" cried Inez turning upon her with a fierceness that made her recoil a step or two. "If he were to die now, and I never to see him again! Think, woman, of his going from the world with all his old dark thoughts of me!"

"Milly will be back shortly."

"She may go at once to Tavvydale House."

"Then she can tell him——"

"I will tell him myself!"

Inez was dressed. She was tying her bonnet firmly on her head, and was pacing the room in her excitement, like the strong woman that her

years might have warranted. She had been slowly gathering strength ; it was possible to walk half a mile without the aid of a friend's arm, if she walked slowly and carefully, but the change in her on that night was startling.

"I will go with you, then, if you are determined," said the neighbour, shaking her head at her friend's obstinacy, as she went out of the room and out of the house for her bonnet and shawl. She was not absent more than five minutes, but on her return, the door was open, and the house deserted. Inez had started on her way.

The old woman set forth at a trot after her, pulling up suddenly to recover breath the instant afterwards, and arriving at once at the conclusion that her galloping days were over. She walked on rapidly about twenty more yards, and was then seized with a stitch in the side, that incapacitated her from further service.

"She must go," said the woman, as she leaned against the garden-fence of one of the Tavvydale cottages. "I can't kill myself for anybody, and it's no business of mine. How she must have walked ! I wonder if she has been shamming all this time!"

Pondering on this supposition, the woman who had meant well walked homewards slowly, giving up all further chase of Inez Athorpe.

Meanwhile Inez, borne along by one idea, was out of the village, and making towards Tavvydale House. Her pace had not slackened yet; she felt strong enough for her task; her footsteps were not faltering, and her breath was good; she should reach there, and tell him whose life she had marred—that she was better than he thought—that she had been innocent of wrong towards him. Only to reach him—only to see him again, and ask his forgiveness for the secret that she had kept from him!—to relieve his mind from the weight that had oppressed it since he had condemned her, and struck her from his path.

He must be sorry to think that he had killed her; if he were mad still, he would be sorry for that, surely, and joy would come to him again with the consciousness of her stepping back to life. Never a woman more sanguine than this of the good results to follow a meeting with her husband—and never a woman more repentant.

All her life she had been narrow-minded, secretive, selfish; she was no heroine even in her better

estate, but she was resolved, sternly resolved, to do her duty by her husband, and let nothing from that day forth stand between him and her. She did not fear that he would attempt her life again—after she had told him the whole truth, he might, if he liked, kill her, she thought. She was tormented by the conviction that she had driven him mad, and she knew how truly he had loved her, and put faith in her. Of Jonathan Fyvie she thought no more; he was a dark figure that had passed away for ever. When he had met her in the Cleft—on her way to good, and needing friends to support her first faltering steps, he had sought to lead her away with him to evil—and she remembered him as the villain that he was. But that strong-hearted, trusting man whose life was bound up in hers, and whose life had thus been clouded at the first suspicion of her duplicity—if she could only be his friend, his slave—if she could only teach him to believe in her again!

A little faith in her—that was but wanted to bring back the past sunshine on them both, and then, with God's help, to begin life afresh.

These thoughts kept her strong for nearly one half of her journey, and then the reaction came

suddenly upon her, and she swayed to and fro, and clutched at the hedges to keep herself from falling.

"It is too much for me," she gasped. "I shall never see him again! I am doomed never to see him!"

She groaned heavily. She sat down on the sloping hedge-bank to rest herself—to pray for a little more strength that should carry her to the house where he was—she wrung her hands together and wept, moaning piteously over the weakness which held her there a prisoner.

"I must see him!" she shrieked at last; "it is not just that I should be kept away from him!"

Then, with another effort, she dragged herself into the middle of the road, along which she ran until she fell there, and lay like a dead woman in the moonlight.

Well for her that the moon was at the full that night, or her own friends might have killed her. They came dashing along the road from Wheal Desperation presently, and Laurence was the first to see the heap of dark clothes in the roadway.

"Some one is lying in advance of us—across the road," he called to the groom galloping by the side of the chaise; "do you see?"

“Good heaven! it’s a woman, sir!”

“Inez!” cried Milly at once—Milly, who was sitting by the side of Laurence, and had been listening to his hopes of better times, and trying in vain to check his sanguine utterance. For she could not see any better times that would be the means of bringing them together.

Mr. Whiteshell, from the back of the chaise, leaped into the road at the same time as Milly, and they were bending over Inez the instant afterwards.

“Yes—it is Inez!” cried Milly. “Oh! what is to be done now?”

The hand of Inez closed upon Milly’s, who bent her head towards her.

“Do I understand you—shall we go on to him?”

Another pressure of the hand, and then the head fell heavily back in Milly’s lap.

“Now, if she is dead—dead like this, Laurence, after her long wish to see him!”

“I can feel her pulse,” said Whiteshell; “let us lift her into the chaise, and drive back as fast as we can to Tavvydale.”

“No, let us go on,” said Milly, “she wishes it. If she recovers, and finds that she is at home again, it will really kill her.”

The groom volunteered to return to the village, fetch a doctor, and bring him on to Mr. Engleton's. He was a good-tempered man, with no objection to late hours. His services were at once accepted, and then, Inez having been lifted into the chaise, away they sped at full speed towards Tavvydale House.

As they passed through the open gates, and went along the broad carriage drive to the house, Inez, to the surprise of all of them, lifted her head from Milly's lap, and looked wildly round her.

"Are we at the house at last?"

"Yes—yes. Are you better, Inez?"

"Oh! what a weary journey it has been."

"But we are at the end of it, and hope is with us," said Milly. "When you have rested——"

"I will not rest," cried Inez, struggling once more strangely back to life; "take me to my husband, those about me who are merciful, for God's sake!"

Inez was assisted from the chaise, and conducted to the hall, where servants, red-eyed and half-scared, were still lingering about. Mr. Engleton's sister met the party, and looked with surprise at it, dashing at Laurence for an explanation.

"Oh! Mr. Raxford, what does this mean?"

"It means, I hope, that we are going to clear up all mystery, and settle down for good now, Miss Engleton!"

"But—but," in a whisper, "this dying woman?"

"Not dying, madam, God forbid that!" cried Milly, who had heard the words. "She has been very ill, and has overtaken her strength in coming here. This is Captain Athorpe's wife—an invalid. She would have died of suspense at home, and so she has ventured to your house in search of her husband."

"Where is he?—can we not see him at once?" demanded Inez.

"Is it any good? He is——" began Miss Engleton, when Inez interrupted her.

"He is mad—I know it!" she said, hastily; "but I, who drove him mad, may bring him back to life. Where is he? I feel strong—very strong again! Don't hold me—I can walk alone."

But they continued to support her, and the procession, silent and thoughtful, went along the corridors, and up the stairs, like ghosts by which the house was haunted. On the first landing they were met by Engleton, who looked as surprised as his sister at the numbers.

"You have heard the story, Mr. Engleton," said Laurence. "This is Mrs. Athorpe and her niece."

"I can't make much out of the old gentleman, Raxford," said Engleton; "but he's an interesting study. If ever I sketch out a plan for a lunatic asylum, I'll have a different mode of treatment for—but it may be as well to talk of this another time."

He led the way to a large room on the first floor.

"I thought that he would be more quiet here," said he, "and out of the way of Mr. Llewellyn, whose red hair seemed to excite him a little too much—as well it might. Raxford, they've gone, by Jove! Athorpe's frightened them clean out of the house!"

"Considering the serious nature of our errand," said Mr. Whiteshell, "this is frivolous talk—and out of place."

"Hollo!" said Engleton, "who's this? Not my dancing master—the only man in England who saw the real advantages of my ragged-school system? It's very odd all of you turning up here to-night like this."

"I say it's very serious!"

"There's nothing very serious about it, unless you have brought it with you," said Engleton, with a glance towards Inez. "Athorpe's quiet enough—and will come round well enough, if you humour him. This way, ladies and gentlemen."

Engleton's easy manner was assuring. But he was not mixed up in this tragedy; he scarcely knew the details of the plot, and he was wholly unaware of the motives which had impelled Inez Athorpe to his house. There was a fair amount of philosophic composure in Charles Engleton that night, and it was at variance somewhat with his natural excitability. But he had seen the Llewellyns out of the house, and even this new influx of strange visitors was only a relief to him. He was on good terms with everybody now, and a madman or two on his premises did not make the least difference to him.

When he was in the room, however, his interest in the story deepened, and he put several questions to Laurence, who was too absorbed in the scene before him to reply. For the wife, as though she had risen from the dead, had passed across the room unassisted to the side of the white-haired

man resting in the large arm-chair by the fire-side. The change in him—the age which had descended on him since their parting—she did not appear to notice ; it was the same man whom she had seen last.

“ Athorpe—Noll—I’ve come !”

Athorpe started, and shivered at the voice. He looked at her, and then at the background of faces in a new bewilderment.

“ Who is this ?” he muttered.

“ It is I, your wife, who was not guilty of going away from you—who was coming back to you full of hope in a new life together, when you met me.”

“ My wife is dead.”

“ No, no—living—living, and at your side here. Don’t you know Inez ?”

“ My wife deceived me, and I killed her. I have been hiding from the gallows ever since—though she deserved to die—though it was better that she should die. You, woman,” pushing her aside, “ are an impostor.”

“ Don’t believe that—at the last !” she implored, “ for I am Inez, and you must know me, Athorpe. Oh ! look at me, and try hard to remember who I am.”

He tried and failed.

"You don't belong to me!" he said.

Milly stepped forward with her uncle Whiteshell.

"You will know us all in time," she said; "we have all come to fetch you home—and make you happy."

"You—ah! you are Milly," said he, his face brightening very much, "the one true woman whom I loved—the dear girl who stood by me, and will do so to the end now. Yes, you are Milly of the Cleft."

"And I?" said Whiteshell.

"Oh! you're the man who took care of me in London," with a furtive glance towards him as he spoke—"James Whiteshell—*my* friend."

"And I?" asked Laurence, who read hopes of Captain Athorpe's recovery in these flashes of memory.

"You—you are Raxford, of Wheal Desperation, and are going to marry my niece. God bless both of you!"

Milly and Laurence both started at this, and Milly shook her head, as if in silent protest against his prophecy.

"And this—who is this, uncle Noll?" asked she, once more indicating the woman, pale and trembling at his side still.

"I never forget a face," he said, looking at Inez again, "and I don't know her. She belongs not to me."

"Wholly forgotten!" murmured Inez, sinking to the ground; "Milly—take me home—and—let me die away from him!"

* * * * *

But Inez Athorpe did not die—though in the relapse which followed her rash journey to her husband, the chances against her living were many; and the wise men who came to see her were doleful in their looks, and hazarded no loss of reputation by speaking of her recovery.

It was her old illness over again, lasting some months, and aggravated by a want of consciousness—a stupor, from which it was difficult at all times to rouse her. She might pass from this to death, it was surmised; but she passed from it to a sense of rest that was not death, but a coming back to life again.

She was in Milly's cottage—where Milly had long ago insisted upon carrying her—when she

stole back to this new life, and looked very anxiously at two figures bending over her, and watching her.

"Milly," she said, "Heaven bless you! you are there still—and ever faithful to me."

"Hush! You are not to speak too much," she whispered.

"Who is this?—can it—can it be——"

Captain Athorpe bent over her and kissed her.

"Yes, it can, Inez," he said; "it is quite possible. Possible to believe that we have seen the worst of everything. Thanks to you, girl," turning to his niece.

"Thanks to God!" was the wise correction here.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW CLERK.

MILLY had two pensioners now in lieu of one at her cottage; that was the only difference that Captain Athorpe's coming has made to the fortunes of Laurence Raxford.

A man more morbid than he might have accepted that difference as one more obstacle towards his love, but he drew therefrom strange hopes, which he kept to himself, lest the world should say that he had turned a castle-builder.

Was he living only for the present, and taking therefrom as much enjoyment as he could?—finding excuses to call at Milly's cottage now, and not balked by any gravity of demeanour on the part of Milly herself, who was, however, nervous at his frequent visits.

Still it was natural that he should call three or four times a week, to ask after Mrs. Athorpe, who

was getting well again—and likely to get better than ever, the doctors ventured to say now—to make sure, too, that Captain Athorpe was steadily improving, keeping step with the woman whom he had learned to trust once more. When the moon was at the full, as Mr. Whiteshell had warned him, it was necessary to watch Captain Athorpe closely, and Laurence was always at the cottage at that period, doing his best to amuse them all. He would have preferred full moons three or four times a month himself—even when full moons, at last, put no check upon the progress to recovery of the mining captain.

Mr. Whiteshell was back again in London. He had spent a month in Tavvydale as custodian of Captain Athorpe, doing him good service, and seeing him a long way on the road to recovery. From London he wrote to Laurence, with the news that he had lost all his pupils in his absence, and that a retired harlequin had set up an opposition shop over the way. Still, he had saved a few pounds, and next season—perhaps at the fag-end of this one—he should be doing well again. He never despaired in London—there was so much to keep him lively—it was only in gloomy places, like

the Cleft, that he felt his spirits leaving him. He knew that something would happen in the Cleft one day, and sure enough every one knew that he was right. So, with love to Milly and Inez—who were to know nothing of the slackness of trade, lest they should be solicitous about his prospects—and with kind regards to Captain Athorpe, and Laurence, he was very truly, James Whiteshell.

“Is there any bad news in that letter, Raxford?” Engleton asked.

He was in the counting-house, doing his fair share of work with the rest, when Laurence read the missive.

“Well, poor Whiteshell has stopped in Devonshire till all his London pupils have deserted him.”

“It’s time he left off dancing,” said Engleton; “what sort of office-keeper would he make for a Mechanics’ Institute, do you think?”

“An excellent one, no doubt.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so before?” cried the master. “Here have I been advertising and corresponding for my model place at Plymouth—and nobody likely to suit me. You haven’t heard of my Soldiers’, Seamen’s, and Mechanics’ Arcadia,

have you? It's a fine idea, and as it's the first thing I have really carried out in all its details—it has been backed, too, by no end of big people—I expect your congratulations. Where's Whiteshell's address? I'll write to him at once."

"Tell him that it's in a cheerful locality, for he detests the country."

"I see."

So James Whiteshell was startled with an offer by return of post, and in less than a week was office-keeper to Mr. Engleton's last idea. The idea was a success, and James Whiteshell is office-keeper there still. After office hours, and when less eccentric people are in their beds, the strains of Captain Athorpe's yellow-backed violin may be heard from the back windows of the Arcadia.

Engleton was a man of many thoughts—to the last day of his life it may be said that he was a restless man. They were thoughts for the well-being of "the masses"—far-fetched, and impracticable most of them—but they were always thoroughly unselfish, and they made him some staunch friends. And though he took broad views of the people, agitated for their benefit, made innumerable

mistakes, and met with a certain amount of ingratitude, by way of counterpoise to his enthusiasm, he thought also of those more immediately connected with him.

"Raxford," he said, one day in the new year, "this mine is likely to be a good thing—a steady paying thing."

"Yes—a quiet, money-getting mine, that will for ages pay a fair per-centage on the capital you have sunk in it."

"The shaft sunk last—just before the Fyvie smash—was a bad spec. But I shall have another try at a lower level—my *own* idea this."

"I think that I would remain where I was."

"Go further, and fare worse, eh? Well, it is not a bad motto, though 'nothing venture, nothing have,' is a better one. A trifle more courage, too—and I admire courage. Now, about our partnership."

"What?" asked Laurence.

"Oh, haven't I told you? I thought that we had almost settled that little affair. If you take a commission on returns, it is just the same as a share in the business; and I—I would prefer that

your name followed mine in this Wheal Desperation."

"For heaven's sake, Engleton, leave me a clerk. Mine is an unlucky name, and brings bad luck to others. Besides, I would not be a partner just yet for all the world."

"Why not?"

"It's my only chance—I must keep myself down, sir. Don't worry me about it, and presently, perhaps—if you really wish it—I will accept a *little* share. But not now."

"Only chance—keep yourself down! You don't mean to say that Milly is at the bottom of this, then?"

"Yes—she is."

"Oh! I see. Can't we manage to make you in the enjoyment of a salary of ten shillings a week? It's a splendid plan! Say you have had a rise to twelve, and want to get married on the strength of it."

"You'll not make a joke of this, Mr. Engleton," said Raxford, half-imploringly. "When I think of Milly Athorpe, I never jest."

"I beg your pardon—this is the first joke I have ever made in my life, and it is not a bad one."

I think," suddenly slapping Laurence between the shoulders, and sending a penful of ink over the accounts, "that we understand each other pretty well."

Mr. Engleton went to town a few days after this, returning in a great bustle, after his usual fashion.

"Make room for another clerk, here," he said to Laurence—"a junior skipjack, who will have to work his way upwards, and who, if he don't behave himself, goes out as unceremoniously as he comes in."

"We scarcely want another clerk in the office," said Laurence; "but as you have engaged him, I daresay we shall find something for him to do."

"I've no doubt of that. You'll look after him. This is my last idea."

The last idea, in the shape of Jonathan Fyvie, junior, came into the office a few days afterwards—a gaunt, thin-faced man, who looked as though fortune had not been propitious to him lately.

"Take no notice of me, Mr. Raxford," he said; "let me have this trial, and be hard upon me if it is a failure. Leave me to my work—which

I understand—and treat me as one on probation here. I have not much faith in myself, but I'll do my best, for the old man's sake."

Laurence took no notice till Engleton arrived. Then he expressed his surprise to him at Jonathan Fyvie's presence there.

"I found him in the streets as ragged as a colt," said Engleton, "and I felt for a fellow who had been once so high in the stirrups as he had. He was dispirited, and without a hope in himself—which was a bad thing. So I gave him a long lecture, and then I offered him—for his father's sake, not his own, I said—a clerkship in this office."

"It was a generous offer."

"You'll see after him, and make a little allowance for a man who has been master here. We mustn't let a Fyvie go wholly to the bad, if we can help it."

But Laurence saw nothing to extenuate in Jonathan Fyvie's conduct, and Jonathan worked patiently and quietly at the books, taking little heed of things passing around him.

"Am I doing my best?" Jonathan asked once when Laurence passed him.

"Yes—no doubt of that."

"It is for the old man's sake, then. If it will please him to hear that I am at work again—and you don't think that I am in the way here—I'll remain."

"For your own sake, too, Jonathan, I hope."

"Presently for mine, perhaps. For the work does not *drag*, as it used."

When he had been a month at the office, the Fyvies learned for the first time that he had settled down to work. Mr. Fyvie, who had been dull of late days, seized the hands of his informant, Mr. Engleton, and shook them warmly in his own.

"How can I thank you for this?" he asked.

"Well, there is a way."

"What is it?"

"Talk your daughter into taking a fancy to me," he replied; "it's about the best thing that could happen to her."

"I begin to think it is myself," said Mr. Fyvie, laughing.

Hester Fyvie certainly greeted Charles Engleton

more warmly the next time he called at her father's house—but whether it was on account of her father's "talking" to her, or in gratitude for his interest in her brother, this history is unable to declare. But there was a difference in her manner towards him, and Engleton took a new lease of hope from it.

When the winter had gone, and there were spring flowers in the Devonshire valleys—the Cleft was golden with the primroses—Captain Athorpe came through the gates of Wheal Desperation. He walked with his old brisk step on to the past scene of action, as though he was coming to his work again, and stopped not until he stood at the mouth of the shaft which led by a hundred ladders to that part of the mine which had been under his supervision.

He seemed as upright as ever, but he had wasted very much, and the storm that had passed over him had lined his face, and whitened every hair upon his head.

Laurence, who had seen him from the office window, hastened at once to join him—for he had almost his doubts of him again, when he noticed his intent, almost gloomy looks down into the mine.

"Good morning, sir," he said upon seeing Laurence—and his first words assured our hero that all was well; "I was thinking if I should venture down there, and see how the old place looks."

"There are many below the surface who would be glad to see you."

"I think there might be," he replied; "for if I was hard with them—rough with them—I was always fair. But my mining work begins in Mexico."

"Mexico!" repeated Laurence.

"That is a climate that will suit me—Inez and me," he corrected, "better than this; and as Captain Peters is going out to this new venture, I have offered to go with him. I think that I have rested long enough."

"If you feel strong, Athorpe, you need not go so far as Mexico for work that is fitting for you."

"I could not work in England," he said with a shudder. "I want to be quit of all this—to begin a new life in a new world. Away from here, I think that I shall be a better man."

"I hope so, Athorpe."

"A year of trouble and crime it has been," he

said—"a long grinding year, that has tried most of us. Why, it is close on twelve months ago since I drank your health in that office."

"We will pray that the next year may be luckier than the last."

"Amen to that!" he cried. "I think it will."

"Is your wife strong enough yet to undertake this journey?" asked Laurence; "she is improving very fast, but she is a weak woman."

"She will take Milly with her," said Athorpe, looking down into the pit again, "for a year or two, until her health is thoroughly established."

"Take Milly!" cried Laurence—"take her away to Mexico?"

"Well, we can't do without her, Mr. Raxford," said Athorpe, "and she is willing to go with us. She will be a part of any home that we may have together—it was never my wish, for that matter, that she should be separated from us."

"Take Milly to Mexico!" repeated Laurence.

"It's no good pretending that I am ignorant of your attachment to Milly, I suppose," he said—and it was the old abrupt Athorpe that spoke here—"it's not my way to fight shy of anything. But we have talked it over, and made up our minds,

and Milly is not likely to alter hers, I fancy. She thinks that we want looking after yet—and go she will."

"She knows best what is her duty," said Laurence gloomily. "When do you go?"

"It is uncertain. Captain Peters resigns his old post on Saturday, I think."

"I am sorry to say that is correct."

"After that—we are under orders to be ready to join our ship at Plymouth at any moment. It may be a week before we go—it may be three months. It depends upon our employer—I shall be glad to be gone for one."

"You will give me fair warning of your going, Athorpe?"

"Certainly."

"May I call to-night and see you—at Tavvydale?"

"With pleasure, sir. If you can persuade Milly to stay, you're welcome."

Laurence did not relish the uncle's confidence in Milly's firmness; and he knew himself how intensely resolute Milly could be. She would see her duty plainly marked out for her yet, and she would vanish away from him for years—perhaps

for ever ! It was evident that everything had been arranged—arranged, he thought a little bitterly, without any consideration for him. He did not believe now that this year would be any brighter than the last.

He was standing by Athorpe's side still, when a third figure came between them, startling Athorpe by his propinquity.

"You—you in this place too !"

"Yes, Captain Athorpe—trying at the eleventh hour to be a better man, and finding it not such hard work as I thought it might be. I have no right to trouble you by my presence—I daresay that I do no good by coming here—but if you will let me tell you how sorry I am for all the past, and for all the evil that I caused in it, I shall take it as a favour."

"Anybody might be sorry for that," said Athorpe bluntly, "and not be much the better man. You'll never amend."

"I'll try."

"It's ingrained in you, and must damn you, man," said Athorpe with greater fierceness ; "I don't want to hear a word that you have to say."

"As you please," said Jonathan ; "I have told

you that I am sorry—I will add, that your wife was not to blame—and that at the last she acted nobly in despising me.”

“It is a lucky thing for you that we did not meet some months ago,” said Athorpe moodily; “but I don’t want your life now. I only pray that I may never meet so cold-blooded a rascal ever again.”

“I can offer no excuses for my conduct,” said Jonathan Fyvie, still humble; “if I knew her first, if I loved her first—I had no right to seek her out after she was married.”

“What do you want with me?” demanded Athorpe; “to drive me mad once more? What are your excuses to me?”

“If you could say to me, Athorpe—if you could even say to me, from her—I overlook the past, and forgive your share in it, I should feel more free.”

“Sir, I have no forgiveness to offer,” said Athorpe sternly; “a man never forgives such treason against his peace as yours has been. Stand aside.”

Jonathan Fyvie made room for him, and Captain Athorpe strode away.

“There,” said Jonathan, “when I try to make

amends for everything, I am balked in my purpose. I can't stop here—I can't face all these people, who know my share in that man's ruin. I must find another berth somewhere."

And he did. For the curse of unrest was upon him, and pursued him, despite all his resolves to amend. He went from the mines to the smelting works, where he stayed three months, and then changed for service in a merchant's office in London, till the American war broke out, when he went soldiering in earnest, and was made prisoner by the Confederates, till the war was ended.

His last letter is dated a month ago, and therein he states that he is settled down in Washington, and likely to get on in life, he thinks. At all events, he can say that he is steady—and that pleases the old man, reading his son's letter very carefully under the garden porch of his villa.

He calls Charles Engleton his son now, and is very proud of him, as a good husband to his Hester—but his heart is faithful to his first-born; it has forgiven him all his trespasses, and is more full of hope in Jonathan Fyvie's future than yours or mine may be.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW IT ALL ENDED.

LAURENCE went to Tavvydale that evening in an aggrieved spirit. He was prepared, at a moment's notice, to grow eloquent upon his wrongs—to upbraid Milly for that new resolution which would separate her more than ever from him.

But Milly was looking very pale and ill, as though her own firmness had tried her very much, and he remained with them till a late hour, saying nothing that could wound her. It was a painful task to sit there and see Athorpe and his wife build their castles in the air, and hear them talk of their future together, with Milly for a friend and counsellor, as though Milly had not a will of her own, or—Laurence sighed at the thought—had never had a lover to study.

It was all over between Milly and him ; if he had not known it till that night, he was assured of it

then. They spoke as if the love story was ended, and the book shut away from them for good; he was their friend; he had a claim upon their kindness and hospitality, for he had been of service to them; but he had no claim on Milly.

Milly had told him so long since, and he had replied that he would wait for her; he would wait for her still for the matter of that, or set forth after her in due course, and bring her back from Mexico some day; that was what he hoped to tell her before he bade them all good night.

Captain Athorpe was almost his old self again—rough and positive, if less conceited—and Inez, though very pale and far from strong, was not the fretful invalid on whom Mrs. Raxford called. But if she was happy, and happiness had worked its usual miracle upon her, still the character had not wholly changed, and amidst all its improvements for the better, the fault of selfishness remained. Laurence thought so, at least; but then he was unsettled, and it was Mrs. Athorpe's influence and entreaties, he was certain, that had exacted a promise from Milly to accompany them. He made no allowance for her weakness, and he thought that she might have considered his loneliness a

little. She knew that he had striven hard against a hundred obstacles in his way to her niece—and yet she had set the reward for his perseverance almost beyond his reach, for he was a man whom they hardly understood yet. He was knitting his brows and thinking of a journey to Mexico as he sat there—and as he went away that night, the opportunity came for him to tell Milly his thoughts.

They were standing together at the door, and he told her at once that if she went to Mexico, in good time he should follow her. She might have dashed him down with the old replies that he was nothing to her, and that she would never acknowledge that he could be more than he was then, but she did not. Tacitly she acknowledged that their positions were changed—that she was aware of his love for her, and had faith in him, for she answered,

“That would be rash, Laurence—your fortunes will be made in dear old Devon.”

“Not without you.”

“Perhaps you will change again,” she said, and, despite the sadness of her voice, there was a ring of the old arch tones in her reply; “Mexico is a

long journey, and there may be years to wait yet."

"I will wait, Milly."

"You think that the clouds are floating from us, then?"

"All floating fast away, I hope," he answered; "and yet you are going to leave me!"

"To take care of them," she answered, "till they are better able to take care of themselves. Then——"

"Then I may come and fetch you back for good, Milly."

"Yes—Laurence—you may."

He took her in his arms and kissed her there, as he had not dared to kiss her for long months, and with her face against his own, he forgot that Mexico was in existence.

He went back with her into the parlour, and sat down facing Athorpe and his wife, to tell them of the new promise that they had made together, and which, God knew, they were not likely to break.

Athorpe expressed his satisfaction, and smote his hand upon the table with his old heartiness. He thought that it would come to that promise,

although Milly had told him that Laurence was not engaged to her, and might possibly marry Miss Fyvie.

"Milly!" cried Laurence, and that was his one reproach of the night.

Mrs. Athorpe said that she was glad, also, and that she would try to get strong more rapidly, for both their sakes; although Laurence must not hurry Milly, or expect to call her his wife for many years yet. They were both young, and could wait, she said, and they both knew how Milly was everything to *her*!

Laurence went home in good spirits, to tell his mother all the news. For the next week there was but little poetry read in that house, for Laurence kept late hours, and went courting every night, making the most of his time before they took Milly away from him.

He thought with a shudder of Mexico when he was not with Milly—of what a blank the years would be until he could set forth to claim her. And no one, not even her husband, was more gratified to see how rapidly Inez Athorpe improved beneath the thoughts of her new life, than Laurence Raxford was.

One afternoon, a few minutes before he had closed his books, and just as he was thinking that he would start early, and have a long evening with Milly, a note was brought to him, a note hurriedly written, and by a special messenger. He opened it, and glanced at the signature—James Whiteshell.

“What has happened now?” he muttered; then he glanced over the lines, and let the letter drop in his dismay.

Had the parting come at last?—and had it come like this?

He took the letter up again, and read it, as though it was his death-warrant. It ran,

“DEAR MR. RAXFORD,

“They could not bear—any of them—the pain of a formal leave-taking; they are not strong, and that, I am desired to say, must plead their excuse. They were aware of it last night, but had not the courage to tell you. They leave Plymouth this afternoon by the *Maximilian*, and they depute me to say, ‘Good-bye—God bless you!’

“Yours truly,

“JAMES WHITESHELL.”

It was a strange epistle, in the Whiteshell style, but Laurence did not stay to consider it. He could only realize the fact that they had all left him without a word—that last night Milly had said “Good night” to him, and let him depart in ignorance of the morrow’s intentions. He could remember that she was more kind, more loving, yet more timid in his parting embrace, and he knew now the cause. But it was not kind to cast him adrift in this fashion—it did not spare them much, and it cost him a great deal.

Still there was a chance that the ship might be delayed, and he would go at once. He had so much to say to Milly—to remind her how often she was to write to him—how truly and patiently he was to wait for her. The letter was still in his hand, when some pencil writing on the back of it caught his quick eye.

It was Milly’s handwriting—he could have sworn to it :

“Come to Plymouth,” it said—an injunction that need not have been given him.

Still the request, or command, gave comfort to him; on second thoughts. It told him that though

Milly had acquiesced in her relations' silent movements, still *she* was anxious to say good-bye to him, and had not the heart to go away without a word. There would be time, he felt sure now, to reach the ship, and clasp his Milly to his heart once more—the special messenger was a hint to that effect. Thank heaven that Milly had rebelled a little at the last, and had not been entirely a slave to her relations' fancies.

He was driving furiously on the road to Tavistock five minutes afterwards; the messenger had begged a lift in that direction, but had scrambled down again in fear for his life, Laurence had proceeded so recklessly upon his mission. His mother and Mr. Fyvie saw him rattle past, and looked with horror after him; they went on towards Tavistock to find out what had become of him, and came back wondering more than ever—for the horse and chaise were outside the railway-station, nobody in charge of them, and Laurence gone.

Meanwhile, Laurence was on his way to Plymouth—was presently running along the Plymouth streets with his hat in his hand, as though he had stolen it.

He was on the quay making inquiries about the *Maximilian* long before the rest of the railway passengers had found their luggage and departed; but he might have waited with the other travellers, for the news was told him that the ship had sailed an hour ago! This he would not believe—he *could* not believe—until it had been reiterated twenty times, and shouted at him by loud-voiced seamen, angry at his obstinacy.

“You may see it from the Hoe, now, if you like,” said one; and Laurence went his way up to the higher ground, to look out at sea for the ship that bore his heart away. A fisherman followed, and when they were on the Hoe, he took the trouble to point out the ship, a speck upon the glistening water in the distance. He waited for a fee for that kindness, and asked three times before Laurence heard him; then Laurence put money in his hands mechanically, staring out at sea with all his eyes still.

“Never mind,” Laurence groaned; “it has saved her many tears, perhaps, and it would have been a parting full of bitter sorrow. She knew what was best.”

“What was best for herself, as well as for my

dreamer here," said a voice behind him, and he turned round to face Milly and her Uncle Whiteshell—to catch Milly in his arms for joy!

"The ship has not sailed, then—and I was right. Oh! Milly, it would have been hard to go away like that."

"The ship has sailed, Laurence—but without me."

"You—you remain!"

"Yes—I could not find the courage," she whispered, "to go away at the last! I told them so last night—I reminded them that they were getting well and strong, and could support each other, and that friends were going with them, on whom they might rely. I told them—and they believed it, and knew that I was right, Laurence—that I had done my duty to them both, and that there remained now my duty towards you, which was the first and highest task before me in the future. For I was a little silly, Laurence, and could not give you up again!"

"My own dear girl—I did not think my happiness was so near at hand as this!"

"And you'll forgive me my little deception, Laurence," said Whiteshell, after discreetly turn-

ing his head away for an instant; "my third person plural did not include my niece."

"He has mixed with theatrical people, and likes surprises," said Milly, laughing; "but I foiled him with a pencil-note, that should have prepared you for the truth."

"Which it did not," said Laurence; "but I forgive him."

"Thank you," said Whiteshell; "that forgiveness accorded, I'll—ahem!—sit down here a little while, while Milly shows you the way to my chambers, where tea is waiting for you. Nothing like a pure fresh breeze from a hill! Besides, I have a passion for sunsets, and this is a bright and ruddy one, that I take as a good omen for the voyagers."

"Which we will take also as a good omen for ourselves, Milly," said Laurence, as they walked away, "speaking of the brightness of the morrow."

So they sauntered down the hill together—she leaning on his arm, and looking at him with her trustful eyes, as she, his fairy wife, and the mother of his first little girl, looks at him in his Devonshire home now.

So with the glow of sunset on them they pass from the pages of this history, and the echo of Uncle Whiteshell's blessing on them lingers with us for awhile.

THE END.



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